

Promoting Beneficial Social Media Use in Lonely College Students with Film

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By
Francesca Ricapito
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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between loneliness and approaches to social media in relation to college students at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Understanding why and how individuals engage with social networks can provide avenues into which they can establish online habits that are beneficial to their overall wellbeing. Qualitative data was gathered from interviews with two members of faculty and staff as well as four students, their responses recorded and interpreted as an essay film. Respondents expressed the need for awareness and mindfulness when approaching social media by periodically assessing their own activities and feelings while online and making personalized changes as necessary. There is no direct and universal pattern between loneliness and activity on social media, but the pervasive presence of mobile technology and online means of communication in our society insists on the corresponding consideration of self-care.

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<https://vimeo.com/222432390/caf0e85dae>

Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

This study focuses on college students, looking for connections between their feelings of loneliness and the ways in which they utilize social media. Diamant and Widholz (1981) found loneliness to be positively related to depression, hopelessness, paranoia, alienation, external locus of control, aggression, and potential suicide. Although loneliness can occur in any age or situational group, college students can be especially susceptible to the stress it can bring about and deal with this stress in ways that perpetuate their loneliness. It is important to engage this group and encourage them to create habits of dealing with common technologies in ways that will positively affect their overall wellbeing.

In addition, content creators live in a constantly-updating industry, in terms of technology available and methods of engaging target audiences. Because of this, it is important to explore innovative ways of communicating a message and affecting the behavior of spectators in beneficial ways.

Background of the Problem

The popularity of social media is a given for the average college campus. The age of college students and the increasing pervasiveness of mobile technology introduced through their lifetime has influenced how people interact with one another as well as how they view themselves. It is speculated that since humans are likely to have a natural sociability that they will use any medium at their resource to express (Freberg, Adams, McGaughey and Freberg, 2010). The danger of online activity is that the format of it transitions users from reaching out to others to becoming passive onlookers. The ubiquity of social media and its implications on the

human experience have been explored, but are relatively underdeveloped when it comes to long-term effects.

Since there seems to be no sign of the end to the ever-present characteristic of social media, it is crucial and advantageous to study how habits related to social media can not only sustain a person's relationships, but help them to thrive and grow in meaningful ways. Instead of looking at the issue in a broad sense of summative numbers, taking into account individual perspectives and feelings can give the problem a human aspect that can help cause change for similar groups.

Since experience is so individualized and nuanced in influence, it is difficult to pinpoint direct causation and types of changes that can every college student can utilize successfully. A more artistic representation of the problem can be explored to communicate commonly-visited ideas in specific and uncommon ways.

Purpose of the Study

College students on any single university campus represent a diverse group of people all brought together under the same atmosphere. Although different, they can exhibit similar problems and needs as their peers, united through shared experience of moving away from home or growing up with current technology and methods of communication being updated constantly. It is important to take stock of these changes to review how they affect students' wellbeing and what can be done to remove some habits and encourage the growth of others.

While loneliness seems to be a part of the human experience, it is important to recognize the tangible detrimental effects it can have on a population that can find themselves isolated and overstressed in a major way for the first time in their lives. There are many factors that contribute

to a person's subjective welfare, but taking a common and pervasive instrument like social media to investigate can reveal ways in which students can act in informed and responsible ways.

In addition, communicating this message can take more abstract and emotive forms to connect with the people it depicts. It is important to explore various forms of communication to reflect essential ideas and recommendations to avoid uniformity and encourage innovation in the media industry.

Setting for the Study

This study is conducted to inform a Senior Project at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Interviews were conducted with six members of the university's campus community, including two members of faculty and staff, one with a scholarly background in psychology and the other in campus health and wellbeing, as well as four students with various characteristics and disciplines. Interviewees were questioned with the same underlying topics, tailored to uncover the unique reflections they can offer the study.

Research Questions

The formation of research questions guided the study into exploring significant reasons for loneliness in college students and possible social media habits that will contribute positively to their experience. Each question is meant to gather personal information and unique insight from various experts about their shared campus environment.

1. What is loneliness and what steps should college students take when confronted with their own loneliness?
2. In what ways are social media use and emotional wellbeing connected?
3. How can the ways students use social media alleviate or increase feelings of loneliness?

4. What kind of actions or information can assist college students to provide them with emotionally-beneficial social media habits?
5. How can a documentary video impact the daily lives and long-term wellbeing of students?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined in order to assist the reader with understanding of the topic of the study and its roots. These terms form a foundation for common understandings of each one as they are applied within the context of the study.

Composed Communication: a method of online communication where one will write or otherwise create a specific response to someone reaching out through social media (Marche, 2012).

Essay Film: a form of multimedia communication that utilizes various forms of nonfiction and narrative storytelling, coming together in an oftentimes complex, abstract, and imaginative way (Arthur, 2003).

Existential Loneliness: a particular subset of loneliness that reflects feeling alienated and powerless to one's situation (Wood, 1984).

Loneliness: an unpleasant sensation that is comes about from a disparate expectation of social relationships and their perceived reality (Perlman and Peplau, 1981, p. 32).

One-click Communication: a more passive approach to social media use, in which a user interacts online with simply a single click response (Marche, 2012).

SNSs: stands for "Social Networking Sites" and represents online websites that provide the structure for users to maintain and create social relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Social Loneliness: a specific type of loneliness characterized by not having and obstacles to creating actual social networks to be able to communicate with (McWhirter, 1997).

UCLA Loneliness Scale: a resource commonly used by those measuring loneliness to decipher the intensity of loneliness and social isolation in specific situations (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980).

Uses and Gratifications Theory: an approach to studying media centered on how people use media in order to fulfill their own needs. It uses an audience-centered approach that focuses on how users utilize media, rather than the effect of media on the user (Uses and Gratifications Theory).

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 introduced the study, including an over view and background behind the problem, the purpose of the study and its guiding research questions, and a definition of relevant terms. Chapter 2 will identify what is known about the topic by collecting and reviewing current published literature. The methodology of the study is laid out in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 considers current beliefs on the topic and introduces the data collected in the study. These findings are organized and presented in a format that addresses research questions. Chapter 5 then discusses and makes a conclusion based on this data. Recommendations are made for beneficial media habit-forming in college students and possible avenues for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter lays out information in existing literature on loneliness and its tendencies in college students and how social media habits and wellbeing in general are connected. These findings are organized by relevancy to each research question.

College Students and Loneliness

Shen (2015) and Ponzetti (1990) define loneliness as a state of emotional distress coming from a discrepancy in the personal relationships that one desires and actually engages in, a perception that is unique to each person. Okazaki (1997) and Suarez, Fowers, Garwood, and Szapocznik (1997) expand upon this definition by placing it in a cultural context. Through studies focusing on ethnic diversity, they found that college students from different backgrounds who go to the same universities have different levels of loneliness and alienation. This points to the subjective quality of loneliness itself. While Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona's (1980) UCLA Loneliness Scale rates the varying degrees of feeling lonely, McWhirter (1997) and Wang, Fink, and Cai (2008) agree with this and also bring up the idea that there are also different types of loneliness and various ways of feeling lonely.

One type of loneliness Wood and Kull (1984) define is existential loneliness, a feeling of being alone and helpless in the world. Perlman and Peplau (1981) discuss this as well, mentioning that going through periods of existential loneliness can allow one to grow through the experience and consequently move further from the possibility of being lonely in the future. Sadler and Weiss (1975) also assert social and emotional isolation as distinct forms of loneliness.

Leck (2006) insisted on the importance of meaningful interaction through self-disclosure. In this study, Leck found that lonely people are less likely to self-disclose and become dissatisfied

with interactions they have with others, making them unhappy with their interpersonal relationships and less likely to pursue them. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found that intensive Facebook use in college students could strengthen feelings of bonding, by being able to maintain social relationships that they created in person as well as allowing them to bridge social capital on the site.

Social Media and Emotional Wellbeing

Diener (2003) makes the point that wellbeing is subjective and is the way in which each individual evaluates their life based on their personal perspective of their mood and overall satisfaction. This makes the requirements for satisfaction and beneficial wellbeing different for each person who experiences it. Wang, Tchernev, and Solloway (2012) examined four human needs—emotional, cognitive, social, and habitual—and found social media users use the sites they are a part of to chase these needs. However, they found social media to only fill some of these needs, which drove the college students studied to increase social media use even more in their pursuit of filling them. Caplan (2007) found a relation that connects loneliness and a preference for online interaction, indicating social anxiety as a strong determining factor in this relationship.

Freberg, Adams, McGaughey and Freberg (2010) assert that modern American culture has become less socially and intimately connected in person, although university students reported having more confidants as older people, which could just be due to age and proximity to family and friends. The study found similar patterns of sociability on Facebook as well as in person, attributing this to the lack of anonymity on this particular website.

Social Media Use and Loneliness

To begin with, Freberg, Adams, McGaughey, and Freberg (2010) assert that university students—especially freshmen—were likely to have at least a moderate degree of loneliness and are in a place of being at risk for the psychological consequences that come from that. However, loneliness did not have a significant effect on whether they had and use a Facebook account. This study pinpoints the importance of making a distinction between the way psychological wellbeing is affected by the kinds of activities people engage with online rather than simply the amount of time they spend on these sites. Austin (2016) reached a similar conclusion in that there was no correlation between the frequency with which college students used social media and their perceptions of their own loneliness.

Whang, Lee, and Chang (2003) found the group they defined as “Internet Addicts” had the highest reported degrees of loneliness and compulsiveness as other groups of varying internet usage. In the same vein, Park (2005) found that loneliness had positive correlations with mobile phone addiction and ritualistic tendencies to use a cell phone to pass the time, finding the mobile phone to act as a depressant. This study determines that having a mobile phone with which to communicate with others does not necessarily make the user less lonely. While Ceyhan and Ceyhan (2008) determine loneliness as the most influential predictor of problematic internet use in their study, they do not come to a conclusion on which or if one variable directly causes the other. Moody (2001) adds to this research with findings that lead to the conclusion that the internet may not be so simple as to be a solely positive or negative influence on a user’s wellbeing. In Moody’s study, those who exhibited high frequencies of internet use also had decreased social loneliness, but those who relied most heavily on online social networks felt the most emotional loneliness.

Junghyun (2009) made a connection between using the internet for non-social entertainment purposes and loneliness in the user, especially if these habits result in less offline socialization. Skues, Williams, and Wise (2012) determined that students who reported higher levels of loneliness also had higher numbers of Facebook friends, asserting this is a way of compensating for a lack of face-to-face relationships. Using social media sites as a way to counter loneliness and life dissatisfaction, Shen (2015) determined, was more likely if the user is more prone to self-disclosure in their offline life. The users' perception of the social networking site's usefulness to help their personal wellbeing affected how much they wanted to continue to use it in this way. Shen mentioned Facebook as an effective tool for companies to use to engage audiences, if their interactions with them resulted in less loneliness in the user.

Awareness of Social Media Habits

The inability to regulate one's media usage can cause users to feel compelled to consume media despite negative consequences, which can turn these behaviors into habits, according to a study by LaRose, Lin, and Eastin (2003). The kind of media addictions present in this study challenge the uses and gratifications theory because the "ritualistic" media use that participants displayed do not call upon social media to fill specific needs of the user, but rather follow a mindless tendency. They decided that self-regulation is worn down as users participate in automatic behaviors that they do not actively recognize, negating the conscious choice of media as well as really engaging with content. Junghyun (2009) points out other damaging effects of using social media as a compulsion, linking it to lower grades in school and missing in-person events.

McWhirter (1997) maintains that skills of learned resourcefulness can help college students in particular to combat feelings of isolation on campus. Those who feel lonely are also more

likely to enact these skills by entering into public commercial spaces in search of companionship, found Rosenbaum, Ward, Walker, and Ostrom (2007).

Although Eels (2015) cites existentialist thought in students as a way that can increase thoughts of alienation, it can also act as a means of confronting isolation and using the internet mindfully. Marche (2012) found “one-click communication” to be less likely to alleviate feelings of loneliness in the one who utilizes it, in comparison to “composed communication” that involves thought and direct response. Similarly, Shaw and Gant (2002) saw the positive effects of chatting anonymously over the internet, with respondents who did coming out of the study period with higher levels of self-esteem and perceptions of social support networks available for themselves.

McKenna, Green, and Gleason (2002) also promoted sharing one’s “true self” over social media and how it can lead to intimate relationships and the possibility of online interactions growing into face-to-face relationships. Similarly, Lee, Noh, and Koo define self-disclosure as “communicating personal information, thoughts, and feelings with other people,” and they determined that feeling lonely made people more likely to self-disclose (2013, 414). The study discusses nature of social media encouraging its users to reveal more about themselves than they would in an in-person interaction. They find that people who self-disclose online are looking for support from their social networks and positive messages they receive in turn improve their overall wellbeing. In this way, the study finds loneliness to be beneficial to social media users if it leads to self-disclosure and subsequent social support in return.

Impacts of Film

When it comes to film and video as a means of communication, Geoff Andrew of the British Film Institute tells *Dazed* that “There’s always somebody manipulating footage and

manipulating reality to present some sort of message” (Yeung, 2014). Influential filmmaker and film essayist Hans Richter wrote in one of the earliest texts on the form of the film essay that this type of video “enables the filmmaker to make the ‘invisible’ world of thoughts and ideas visible on the screen,” a tactic that “produces complex thought, reflections that are not necessarily bound to reality, but can also be contradictory, irrational, and fantastic,” taking the traditional film to new heights and levels of meaning (Richter, 1940). The essay film can utilize various forms of film genres and avenues of storytelling in the same narrative. It is not bound by any single characterization, but acts as a “meeting ground for documentary, avant-garde, and art film impulses.” It can act as a non-fiction form that communicates interview and live footage, while championing both “intellectual and artistic innovation” that can “blend abstract ideas with concrete realities” (Arthur, 2003). This complicated description is what makes the essay film such an innovative and effective communication tool. The perplexing and inventive structures of an essay film combine various “practices that undo and redo film form, visual perspectives, public geographies, temporal organizations, and notions of truth and judgement within the complexity of experience.[...] [Essay films] lean toward intellectual reflections that often insist on more conceptual or pragmatic responses” (Corrigan, 2011).

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter presents the methods used to collect data for the study including the data sources, collection and presentation of the data, delimitations, and limitations.

Data Sources

For this study, six sources from the Cal Poly campus community were interviewed for their perspectives on similar topics. Two professional sources were chosen, one with a background in psychology and the other in student wellbeing and health education, along with four student respondents. Topics focused on were chosen to answer the original research questions regarding college students' loneliness and the ways in which they interact with social media. Specific questions were tailored to each respondent to address their individualized experience.

Participants

The professional with a background in psychology chosen to be interviewed was Dr. Laura Freberg, a professor in the Psychology department at Cal Poly and an author of various psychology textbooks and research articles, some of which engage with topics related to social media and public perceptions related to it. Genie Kim is the other professional chosen for an interview. She is the current Director of Wellbeing and Health Education for Campus Health and Wellbeing at Cal Poly. Students chosen for the interview voluntarily responded to a call on a public Cal Poly-based Facebook group inquiring about student perspectives surrounding loneliness as college students. Lisa Haight is a fourth-year Political Science major, Maddison Burgess is a second-year Journalism major, Nicholas Lapidus is a second-year Biomedical Engineering major, and Natalya Suttmilller is a second-year Anthropology major.

Interview Design

Each interview was centered around the following topics and served as data sources for the study:

1. What is loneliness? How should students act in the face of their own loneliness?
2. How do social media and emotional wellbeing affect one another?
3. How can a students' approach to social media affect their loneliness, in particular?
4. What kind of information can students use to provide them with beneficial social media habits?

These topics were further tailored for respondents to gather information based on their specific type of expertise. Questions were not delivered in a single order each time, but varied in order and specifics to follow a line of conversation that was more personalized to the direction of each interview.

Going into the interview with Laura Freberg, I had prepared the following questions to ask, based on her previous research and expertise in psychology:

- Tell me about the research you have engaged with concerning loneliness and how it relates to social media? How do your findings apply to this campus, in particular?
- Describe loneliness? What is it?
- How prevalent would you say loneliness is in the students on this campus?
- What is the biggest predictor of loneliness in college students?
- Are there certain types of loneliness that college students encounter the most?
- How often do students recognize loneliness in others?

- Does loneliness affect social media use, or does social media affect loneliness. Or is it not that linear?
- How is social connectivity different from face-to-face interactions versus online?
- Are there certain activities that students participate in on social media that either alleviate or increase loneliness?
- How can students change their social media habits to make them beneficial to their wellbeing?
- What should students do when they feel lonely?
- Is there anything else you think people should know about loneliness and social media as it pertains to college students?

Before the interview with Genie Kim, I prepared the following questions to address her experience working in Campus Health and Wellbeing at Cal Poly:

- Tell me about the work you do at Campus Health and Wellbeing.
- Describe loneliness? What is it?
- How important is social connectivity to student wellbeing?
- How prevalent is loneliness in students on this campus?
- How often do students come to you about their loneliness?
- What is the biggest predictor of loneliness in college students?
- What kind of education do you offer to help students with loneliness?
- How often do students recognize loneliness in others?
- Have you seen any connections between the ways students use social media and their overall wellbeing?
- How can students use social media to make them beneficial to their wellbeing?

- How can students change detrimental habits they may have?
- What should students do when they feel lonely?
- Is there anything else you think people should know about loneliness and social media as it pertains to college students?

To engage the perspective of students specifically, I used the following list of questions to gather each of their personalized perspectives:

- Tell me about yourself. Anything that comes to mind.
- When are you most lonely?
- What are your perceptions of loneliness in others around you?
- Three types of loneliness are emotional or intimate loneliness, social loneliness, and existential loneliness. Emotional or intimate loneliness is defined by a feeling of isolation and an inability to share aspects of your life intimately with others. Social loneliness is a feeling of isolation and a lack of social networks to reach out to at all. Existential loneliness is feeling alienated and helpless, like nothing you could do would matter. Do you identify with any of these classifications of loneliness?
- Describe loneliness: how does it feel?
- Tell me about your personal experiences with loneliness.
- Have you found anything that alleviates loneliness?
- Do you talk to your friends or post on social media about being lonely?
- How many social media sites are you currently a part of? Which sites? What do you use these sites for and how often are you on them?

- Would you say you spend more time taking in information or posting on your own page?
- How important are your personal profiles to you?
- How often do you directly communicate with another person over social media?
Did that make you feel closer to that person?
- At night, when you look into the sky, what do you think about?
- How would you advise students to act when they feel lonely?
- Is there anything else you think people should know about loneliness and social media as it pertains to college students?

Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study was six individual interviews with each respondent. The interviews were conducted during May 2017 and lasted an average of 35 minutes each. Each interview was recorded in an audio/video capacity to compile in an accompanying video. Interviews were conducted in a conversational tone, based on a single list of pertinent topics, while adapting to the trajectories of individual conversations.

Data Presentation

The data collected during each interview was documented through audio and video recordings. These digital recordings were used to compose a written transcript after the interviews to document the unique specificities of each interview and provide context to conclusions made about the responses. This form of the data provides a complete and thorough reflection of each interview conducted. The data was also interpreted as an accompanying video essay that reflects feelings and ideas that the data embodies in a more abstract sense. This artistic

approach to the data offers a perspective of qualitative data that can be communicated in an emotionally expressive sense.

Delimitations

There are limitations to this study based on the kind of data collected as well as the process of choosing people to interview. Interviewees were all chosen because of their relationship to California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Also, to ensure willingness to participate and relevant personal experience, each student in the study independently responded to identical posts on a widely-used Cal Poly-based Facebook group page. Using Facebook as a platform to recruit interviewees excludes the population of people that might want to participate, but not have access to or had viewed the post. This method also represents a voluntary response sample, which relies on convenience and has the possibility of including more extreme opinions than might be represented in a larger and more diverse population.

Even while trying to represent truthful and honest feelings expressed by respondents, the nature of film and visual imagery also holds an inherently biased viewpoint that is determined through editing, representation, and decisions over how the image looks.

Limitations

This study was conducted as part of a 10-week course at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Responses reflect an individual's personal opinions based on their own experience. In this way, qualitative answers cannot necessarily reflect the opinions of others, even if they share similar backgrounds or characteristics. Results also are reflective of cultures experienced on this particular campus and do not necessarily extend to other universities.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Chapter 4 reflects the respondents interviewed in the study and their insights on the given topic. Descriptions are provided of each person interviewed as well as a summary of their thoughts in relation to the list of four objective points listed in Chapter 3. Relevant and significant answers are chosen from each interview and included in the form of direct quotations or paraphrased responses. Organized responses are then reviewed, examining them based on the study's initial research questions and the opinions gathered in Chapter 2 that detail information found in existing literature. In order to more easily draw conclusions from the data gathered, respondents will be organized based on the characteristic traits in which they were recruited to the study, meaning the four students will be considered as a group.

Description of Respondents

Laura Freberg is a current professor in the Psychology department at California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo. She earned her B.A, M.A., and Ph. D. in Psychology from UCLA. She has been in the business of education since being a teaching assistant at UCLA in 1975 and has been working at Cal Poly beginning as a lecturer in 1985 and as a professor since 1999. She has written and published textbooks on introductory psychology as well as various scholarly research articles. Most pertinent to this study were her articles about topics surrounding social media and the ways in which they influence perceptions and subjective loneliness.

Genie Kim has been the Director of Wellbeing and Health Education for Campus Health and Wellbeing since May 2016, where she interacts with students, faculty, and staff on behalf of health and wellbeing resources that are available on campus. She earned her B.S. in Human

Development and Family Studies from Pennsylvania State University and her Master's in Public Policy from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Before coming to Cal Poly, she gained experience at University of California, Santa Barbara as the Education and Outreach Coordinator and then the Operations Manager for the Alcohol and Drug Program there.

The students who volunteered to be interviewed in this study were, in alphabetical order by last name, Maddison "Madi" Burgess, Lisa Haight, Nicholas Lapidus, and Natalya Suttmiller. All students are currently attending California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo as full-time students. Burgess is a second-year Journalism major, Haight is a fourth-year Political Science major, Lapidus is a second-year Biomedical Engineering major, and Suttmiller is a second-year Anthropology major. They all responded to a call over social media that asked for students who were willing to share their personal experiences with loneliness through the lens of a college student.

Research Questions

The study uses a series of research questions in order to determine current scholarly knowledge relating to college students and their perceived loneliness as well as social media habits.

Research question 1: What is loneliness and what steps should college students take when confronted with their own loneliness?

- "Loneliness reflects an interpersonal deficit that exists as a result of fewer or less satisfying personal relationships than a person desires" (Ponzetti, 1990, p. 336).
- "First, loneliness results from deficiencies in the person's social relations; second, loneliness is a subjective phenomenon (it is not necessarily synonymous with objective

isolation, so that people can be alone without being lonely); third, loneliness is unpleasant and distressing” (Perlman and Peplau, 1981, p. 32).

Research question 2: In what ways are social media use and emotional wellbeing connected?

- “The strong linkage between Facebook use and high school connections suggests how SNSs [social networking sites] help maintain relations as people move from one offline community to another.[...] Online interactions do not necessarily remove people from their offline world, but may indeed be used to support relationships and keep people contact, even when life changes move them away from one another” (Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe, 2007).
- “Individuals who spend more time online are more likely to have higher rates of social loneliness based on correlational evidence. This suggests that the impact of the Internet on emotional wellbeing may be more complex than previously thought and cannot be viewed as having solely a negative or beneficial effect” (Moody, 2001, p. 395).
- “Problematic Internet use is significantly correlated with loneliness” (Odacı and Kalkan, 2010, 1095).

Research question 3: How can the ways students use social media alleviate or increase feelings of loneliness?

- “Individuals who are lonely and use the Internet to compensate their deficient social skills might experience negative life outcomes (e.g., harming other significant activities such as work, school, or significant relationships) instead of relieving their existing problems. [This model] suggests that individuals who are not psychosocially health (e.g., are lonely) have difficulty not only maintaining healthy social interaction in their real

lives but also regulating their Internet use. Moreover, these individuals end up adding additional problems to their lives besides their loneliness. The increased problems might drive them to rely more on their favorite online activity as a means to diminish or escape from their augmented troubles, which could isolate them and increase loneliness more.[...]This pattern suggests a potential malicious cycle of unregulated Internet use if not moderated.” (Junghyun, 2009, p. 454-455).

- “When people use SNSs, they tend to establish strong ties online, and strong ties support high quality friendships and social companionship, which ultimately enhance their well-being. [...] Even if lonely people feel lower levels of well-being, the well-being of these people can be enhanced by the use of SNSs. The results suggest that when people who are very lonely use SNSs and engage in self-disclosure, they may have opportunities to receive social support from people they already know and accordingly feel increased levels of well-being” (Lee and Noh, 2013, p. 416).

Research question 4: What kind of actions or information can assist college students to provide them with emotionally-beneficial social media habits?

- “As self-regulation becomes less vigilant, the media behavior in question becomes automatic and habitual; indeed, the loss of self-control is one of the recognized preconditions for automatic, habitual behavior” (LaRose, Lin, & Eastin, 2003, p. 244).
- Moira Burke: “People who received composed communication became less lonely, while people who received one-click communication experienced no change in loneliness” (Marche, 2012).

Research question 5: How can a film impact the daily lives and long-term wellbeing of students?

- “Essay films lean toward intellectual reflections that often insist on more conceptual or pragmatic responses, well outside the borders of conventional pleasure principles” (Corrigan, 2011).
- Matching the ethereal qualities of loneliness itself, essay films “[enable] the filmmaker to make the ‘invisible’ world of thoughts and ideas visible on the screen,” which “produces complex thought” (Richter, 1940).

Data Collected

This study is centered around the culture on the Cal Poly campus, looking to collect subjective perspectives that can form the basis for a video that communicates their feelings. Because of this context, it was important to seek unique perspectives from sources that will have insight based on experience at this university. In order to collect these perspectives, Laura Freberg, a psychology professor, Genie Kim, the Director of Wellbeing and Health Education for Campus Health and Wellbeing, as well as students Maddison Burgess, Lisa Haight, Nicholas Lapidus, Natalya Suttmiller were interviewed for the study. They were asked questions that followed identical base topics, but were customized based on significant experience. The following summaries, tables, and figures display responses that are applicable to the original research questions.

Research question 1: What is loneliness and what steps should college students take when confronted with their own loneliness?

This study question gives a basis for how to classify an abstract feeling such as loneliness. Known research classifies different types of loneliness and what leads people in general to feeling it. Loneliness is described as a distressing feeling that arises when a person

perceives their expectations for their interpersonal relationships as not being met. It is important to understand the causes of loneliness before detecting what to do in response to it.

There is no universal step-by-step method to follow when one feels lonely, and this is reflected by the variable conclusions in current literature on the topic. This question was addressed in interviews to gather a human reference point for what people with various forms of expertise recommend doing with the onset of loneliness.

Table 1 summarizes similar ideas of loneliness from all respondents. All categories of respondents mentioned some sort of subjective determination of an inability to connect with other people in a social way. Freberg expands upon this and defines it as the effect it has on motivation, explaining that it gives people a reason to find people to engage with.

In terms of a response to feelings of loneliness, Kim highlighted the importance of introspection to discover what exactly is causing the loneliness and what kind of activities have the power to combat it. As one of the students interviewed, Suttmiller suggested making changes to a daily routine to discover people and activities that can combat loneliness, lining up with Freberg’s recommendations to make a conscious effort to realign oneself with an available social network.

Table 1

Defining Loneliness and Responses to It

Respondent	What is loneliness?	What should college students do when they get lonely?
Laura Freberg	Motive for social activity	Reengage with social network, do something kind for someone else

Genie Kim	“Affects everyone differently,” social or mental health caused barrier to being interactive with others	Pinpoint reasons for feeling loneliness and joy before taking steps to create these situation
Students (Maddi Burgess, Lisa Haight, Nicholas Lapidus, Natalya Suttmiller)	Removed from social situations psychologically or physically, unable to connect, urge to experience things with others, dependent on mentality	Use loneliness to motivate a change in daily habits

Research question 2: In what ways are social media use and emotional wellbeing connected?

Given that the cornerstone of this study is an exploration of the ways in which college students utilize social media platforms and how it makes them feel, it was important to ask interviewees about their perceptions of possible causation. Even though it is likely that neither factor directly influences the other in comprehensive and straightforward ways, it is important to reflect personalized viewpoints of this relationship.

All of the respondents consider social media as a platform to produce different results based on intentions when using it. Freberg cites research she contributed to in her reference to “the rich get richer” model of viewing social media, meaning people likely utilize social media in an extension of their habits as they are performed offline. Kim notes that all aspects of a person’s personality and daily life do not have to be reflected in someone’s online presence, however. Students also note that our feelings are not determined solely by using social media, but the long-term effects of the ubiquity of social media are yet to be discovered. Table 2 reflects and summarizes these findings.

Table 2

Connections Between Social Media and Emotional Wellbeing

Respondent	How do social media and emotional wellbeing affect each other?
Laura Freberg	“The rich get richer”: online habits reflect offline sociability
Genie Kim	Social media as “tool” to construct image of public self that does not include all feelings a person experiences
Students (Maddi Burgess, Lisa Haight, Nicholas Lapidus, Natalya Suttmiller)	Contingent on intentions, social media prevalent in our culture and not a simply good or bad thing, overall emotional state influences approach to actions on social media, unsure which affects the other more

Research question 3: How can the ways students use social media alleviate or increase feelings of loneliness?

This question helped gain a basis for professional and experiential recommendations of how to how to engage with social media. Although individuals’ responses may not apply to a broad public, they can provide tangible methods of altering mindsets in terms of social media use. Asking for direct positive and negative influences of social media reflected similar results from respondents, as seen in Table 3.

As for ways social media can increase loneliness, many detriments were centered around perceptions of others on social media and a loss of control when engaging with the technology. Both Freberg and multiple students mentioned a tendency to compare daily life with the idealized and constructed images found on social media, causing an unrealistic and unequal comparison. Also, Kim and various students corroborated the same points of the sensation Kim

describes as being “sucked into” the endless stream of constant content being created and shared on social media.

As for ways social media can alleviate feelings of loneliness, all respondents mentioned some means of getting into contact with other people online. Kim highlights the potential to make professional connections through sites such as LinkedIn and Freberg stresses the benefits of focusing on creating content that improves the wellbeing of others. Rather than being a secondary source of social connections, student respondent Lapidus brings up the possibility that meeting and establishing meaningful relationships is more of a strain in person, with online games and Facebook creating a low-pressure platform to quickly connect with people who share his interests and sense of humor.

Table 3

Social Media Affecting Loneliness

Respondent	How can using social media increase loneliness?	How can using social media alleviate loneliness?
Laura Freberg	Negativity due to social comparison	Avoid narcissism, reach out to and focus on others
Genie Kim	Decreased amount of face-to-face communication, “sucked in”	Professional networking
Students (Maddi Burgess, Lisa Haight, Nicholas Lapidus, Natalya Suttmiller)	Compulsive scrolling, social comparison and feeling left out, “distractions stop being effective”	Easier platform to meet people based on shared interests/feelings and be social

Research question 4: What kind of actions or information can assist college students to provide them with emotionally-beneficial social media habits?

In order to make recommendations to change common habits, it was important to gather data on what respondents considered helpful to know when it comes to altering established actions. This query involved both information that may be powerful enough to cause habitual change as well as tangible actions that they could take shape as. Table 4 reflects a common impression of the need for mindfulness when interacting with online social networks.

Freberg begins her discussion of how to treat social media by explaining that looking in a mirror makes one unhappy. She uses the detriments of self-referential media to suggest that people take note of their social media use in order to analyze and alter it. Kim and the student respondents held similar ideas, noting that it is important to be aware of what kind of online interactions will result in satisfying connections as well as keeping in mind the constructive nature of social networking profiles.

When it comes to applying this newfound awareness, there is no single way to better wellbeing. Suggested actions range from using social media so that posts make others smile, causing the original poster to feel good as well, to scheduling time away from technology altogether.

Table 4

Information and Ways to Apply Beneficial Social Media Habits

Respondent	Information to encourage beneficial social media habits?	Example of actionable application
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Laura Freberg	Audit social media habits; everything self-referential lowers mood, focus on others improves it	Post content intended to improve the moods of others
Genie Kim	Be in connection with personal feelings, preferences, and needs	Create boundaries: schedule offline alone time, communicate with others through different means
Students (Maddi Burgess, Lisa Haight, Nicholas Lapidus, Natalya Suttmiller)	Awareness of formulated image of online profiles, everyone has different needs	Change routine to meet with more people

Research question 5: How can a film impact the daily lives and long-term wellbeing of students?

This research question was chosen to utilize a multimedia approach to inspire thought in an audience and guide them towards thoughtful habit creation. Qualitative data was compiled to bring together multiple perspectives and embody the conclusions of this study in the form of an essay film. This resulting short essay film can be found by online link in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Alone Online?

<https://vimeo.com/222432390/caf0e85dae>

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

This study was meant to explore the relationship between habits on social media and loneliness in college students that engage with it. The data collected was then utilized in a short video essay that indicates findings and suggests future actions. Although wellbeing and social media as well as loneliness in college students have been explored in literature previously, this study centered methods around the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo as a reference point for this particular case study.

In order to gather perspectives that were unique and based on experience relevant to the topic being studied, a professional in the field of psychology as well as campus health and wellbeing were interviewed, along with four student volunteer respondents. Each interview was constructed to answer research questions initially laid out for this study:

1. What is loneliness and what steps should college students take when confronted with their own loneliness?
2. In what ways are social media use and emotional wellbeing connected?
3. How can the ways students use social media alleviate or increase feelings of loneliness?
4. What kind of actions or information can assist college students to provide them with emotionally-beneficial social media habits?
5. How can a film impact the daily lives and long-term wellbeing of students?

Tailored versions of these questions were delivered to each respondent based on their individualized backgrounds in order to target the experience-based knowledge that makes them

unique in this study. These qualitative findings can be compared to existing literature written on this topic.

Discussion

The findings from chosen respondents detailed in Chapter 4 can be compared with existing published knowledge on the topics researched. Connections between these sources lead the study to make conclusions concerning the original research questions.

Research question 1: What is loneliness and what steps should college students take when confronted with their own loneliness?

Loneliness is defined as a perceived discrepancy between what one desires in their social relationships and what they actually receive (Ponzetti, 1990). A study by Suarez, Fowers, Garwood, and Szapocznik (1997) takes this further by revealing that students of different ethnicities on the same college campuses experience different levels of loneliness during the same periods. This describes loneliness as a feeling that is sensed based on cultural context and attitude towards one's surroundings.

Data collected aligned with these descriptions, Kim making a point that similar situations are received differently based on a student's personalized background. The commonality between all experts interviewed is an association between loneliness and an expressed inability to connect with others, despite efforts to.

Loneliness itself can be based on a complicated junction of several different influences. While loneliness was found to be positively related with depression, hopelessness, paranoia, alienation, external locus of control, aggression, and potential suicide, existing literature had no single answer as to what steps a college student when they find themselves lonely (Diamant & Windholz), 1981. However, those in the study offer broad moves to enact when lonely, Kim

suggesting students introspectively review why they might feel lonely before deciding what steps to take because of it, in an effort to solve the underlying problem of an issue rather than a resulting symptom that takes the form of loneliness.

Research question 2: In what ways are social media use and emotional wellbeing connected?

Loneliness cannot be taken as an emotional island because it is affected by other aspects of mood and overall satisfaction, perceptions that change based on the views of each unique person (Diener, 2003). The literature reflects people looking to fulfill various needs of theirs through social media outlets, but finding they cannot adequately cover them all (Wang, Tchernev, & Solloway, 2012). This basis aligns with established ideas of the Uses and Gratifications Communication theory, expressing the idea that social media users engage with the platform in the first place in order to meet their perceived needs for themselves (Uses and Gratifications Theory).

Freberg considered social media and wellbeing well-explained in the approach that “the rich get richer,” meaning those online act out the same personality traits as they do in person. Kim’s responses agree with this, calling the platform a “tool,” being that it’s a reflection of who a person is, although it can be manipulated through decisions of how much of a person’s life they choose to represent.

Humans have basic needs that motivate them into preserving their health, whether it is through finding food and water or establishing a community. Because social media is such a convenient and instantaneous way to connect with other people, it lends itself to being an attractive option of finding and communicating with others. However, as Suttmilller attests to, its

use alone cannot determine one's wellbeing; the internet and everything on it is just a means of filling our human needs that people use because they so easily can.

Research question 3: How can the ways students use social media alleviate or increase feelings of loneliness?

Various sources of existing literature look at internet and social media use and its effects based on the amount of time users spend online. Some studies find no correlation between these factors (Austin, 2016). However, another proposes a reciprocal relationship that connects internet use and negative social wellbeing, believing online relationships to be a less meaningful replacement for offline interaction, despite the stated contention of this conclusion. The differing statements on the effects of the amount of time spent online and resulting mood are addressed in by Freberg, Adams, McGaughey, and Freberg with the verdict that it is important to take into account what actions users are performing on social media, rather than simply their frequency of use in order to predict possible feelings (2010).

A commonly-mentioned aspect of harmful social media use is the prevalence of compulsive and passive online presence. This kind of non-activity respondents mentioned could help explain why longer time spent on social media leads to unhappiness, because it only supplied the user with a distraction to their life while not offering a beneficial result. A student interviewed for this study, Lapidus felt he has created meaningful connections with individuals he has met online. These connections have supported him in ways that were harder to achieve in face-to-face instances and even led to time spent together offline.

Research question 4: What kind of actions or information can assist college students to provide them with emotionally-beneficial social media habits?

Information in existing literature points to the employment of mindfulness to avoid the compulsion to continue scrolling through social media sites to the point of inattentiveness (LaRose, Lin, & Eastin, 2003). Even when actively interacting with content online, it is important to engage in composed communication, creating specific and thought-out responses to certain people rather than simply clicking a reaction, an exercise which had not effect on a person's mood (Marche, 2012). Additionally, loneliness can prompt social media users to self-disclose their feelings online, something that leads to fewer feelings of alienation if it causes their online networks to respond with messages of support (Lee, Noh, & Koo, 2013). It is suggested that college students are taught a useful set of skills and self-resources that they can enact when they feel alienated in order to reinsert themselves into available social groups, a method that can be employed on or offline (McWhirter, 1997).

Similar to existing findings, all individuals in the study made a point exemplifying the importance of self-awareness of actions and feelings. Both professionals interviewed suggested students know how to conduct audits of their own habits and moods so as to not exacerbate a problem that can be avoided through mindful changes. Students interviewed approached a need for awareness of the nature of social media and the tendency of personal profiles to not reflect holistic lifestyles of the people they represent. Freberg suggests students actively look to create content on their pages with the intention of making the people in their networks smile, which would invariably involve some thought and specificity into the content and target of the message. Though Kim and most of the students' approaches to beneficial social media use was to spend more time away from the sites altogether.

By helping college students instill a habit of periodically evaluating how they are creating and taking in media on social networking sites, they can distance themselves from sites when

they begin to hurt more than they help. This method must begin with providing students with the language to characterize their loneliness and why it can occur. From there, they can set for themselves time limits for how long they have spent in a single session online. Students can then assess their activity and their mood compared to when they logged in and either change their approach to interacting with the media in front of them or engage in a new activity altogether.

Research question 5: How can a film impact the daily lives and long-term wellbeing of students?

Literature describing the form of the essay film cite its complex form and how narrative structure can combine subjective feeling with perceived reality to create a result that is “contradictory, irrational, and fantastic,” adding an abstract and artistic lens to the exploration of equally complex problems (Richter, 1940). The elusive being of loneliness and the various intersecting qualities that can precede and result from it seems like an ideal subject for a multimedia representation that can reflect “intellectual reflections that often insist on more conceptual or pragmatic responses” (Corrigan, 2011).

Interpreting the data as an essay film created visual meaning to accompany the written findings. The format allowed feelings of isolation despite seeming connectivity online to be represented visually: disconnected and overlapping portrayals of students portray them with each other, yet oblivious to those around them.

The film also incorporates straightforward methods that students can weave into their own lives if they find themselves unfulfilled by their time on social media. The presentation of these tips is layered in a way that inspires more thought about the narrative form, asking the viewer to evaluate the film’s meaning as well as their own approach to technology.

Recommendations for Practice

Because of the stated importance of meaningful communication, college students can practice reminding themselves to be aware of how they are acting and feeling when it comes to social media. However, public relations practitioners can utilize this knowledge to engage their college-aged audiences in beneficial ways. Practitioners can strive to not just create content to get the attention of viewers, but find ways to make them think and feel recognized through their interactions with a company. These tactics can include creating content that is intriguing and affects a viewer more deeply than the average social media post, asking the viewer to interact or follow up with a composed response. This can also involve speaking directly to individual members of an audience to make them feel recognized and create a personalized connection than a more broad and general communication would result in.

Just as social media continues to change as each day goes by, the media industry can challenge itself to frame ideas in new and inventive ways. Instead of relying on traditional forms of media, creators can look to implement not necessarily the essay film specifically, but various genres to create content that is creative and engaging for their audiences.

Recommendations for Further Research

Furthering the conclusions made in this study can take various forms, by changing the foundational variables its built upon. For example, research can replace loneliness with other sensations that can influence and be influenced by social media use. Studies can take a more optimistic and pleasurable approach to research by finding the joy or humor that can be created through interaction on social media. In the same vein, future studies can gather data from students, faculty, and staff at other universities or even populations in various other ages and situations to understand how their habits and perceived wellbeing compare with one another.

The final essay film was created as a study in how complex ideas can be approached and communicated in more innovative ways to connect with an audience. However, this study did not examine a student response to this kind of content, leaving the study unsure whether or not it is effective in altering behavior and creating mindfulness. Continued studies could possibly involve an audience more gaining thoughts on various forms of communication and their effects on student habit-formation.

Study Conclusion

Loneliness is decidedly a normal human emotion and everyone is expected to experience it at one time or another without heavy long-term detriment. However, extreme feelings of alienation and physical isolation can take very real effects to a person's health, especially someone dealing with pressures of scholarly production, social interaction, as well as other needs as college students find themselves doing.

This study takes as a given the ubiquity of social media, looking at how its utilization and the feelings of the user intermingle because of this prevalence. Using social media sites regularly cannot in itself be deemed a positive or negative thing, or even forming a direct back-and-forth relationship with overall wellbeing. College students, with their particular reliance on social media to maintain and create relationships as well as their positions of learning how to independently balance all their intersecting needs, face special difficulties in keeping up with practices of self-care.

For this reason, it is important to inform and guide students into self-awareness of their social media habits and how their mood and social media use influence each other. By informing them and engaging them to think about their own experience, college students can be encouraged to wean themselves from unhelpful habits and establish beneficial ones. These tactics begin with

evaluating how one feels through social media interactions and consistently reminding themselves to be mindful so as to not make themselves lonely where they were not before, or increase their loneliness through thoughtless social media use.

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Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: Laura Freberg

The following interview was conducted to gather insight from a professional with a background in psychology, based on a set of topics that reflect the study's initial research questions.

Interviewer: Francesca Ricapito
Respondent: Laura Freberg, Ph.D.
Date of Interview: 5/22/17

Interview Transcription:

Francesca Ricapito: Um, could you just start by saying your name for me and then spelling it.

Laura Freberg: Alright, my name is Laura Freberg, uh do I have to spell Laura? L-A-U-R-A. Freberg is F-R-E-B-E-R-G.

FR: I like totally looked it up, we just like, that's what they tell us in all the Journalism classes, you know?

LF: Oh yeah. Yeah. Well, and you want people to pronounce it too, right?

FR: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Um, so like can you just tell me a little bit about the research you've done with loneliness, and how it relates to social media?

LF: Um, well I can't say that, that I'm the big player here, I mean, when you're looking at uh research on college students, you're going to want to look at Cutrona and Russell, and I don't know if you've probably come across the UCLA Loneliness Scale, um that's kind of the beginning, and so college students are already very lonely, um they're one of the loneliest groups that Russel and Cutrona actually studied. Apparently the least lonely people are elementary school teachers; I guess they need some me time, they're just so inundated with social. And so, the one study that our group did do, um, is that we compared online and offline connectivity. Um, they're two basic theories that people go back and forth with, with media in general, not just social media, but it's kind of laying the foundation for, for social media, and that's that media is a compensating mechanism so if you're a disturbed loner offline, you can be somebody new online, okay, that's one model. And so there we would expect people to have differing um levels of connectivity online and offline. And the other model um, which makes more sense to me, is that human beings are human beings and we just kind of carry who we are through the various situations in our lives. We have some personal consistency, and so that approach would suggest that our, uh, sort of predict that people who are very connected offline would also be very connected online, which is actually what our study showed. Um, we uh gave a number of measures, we looked at the UCLA Loneliness Scale, and we looked at how many interactions people reported a day with real people, you know kind of their do you talk to people, you know, face-to-face, do you have telephone voice conversations, you know, what are you doing, and then we looked at their um, the time that they spent, at the time Facebook was really the main

player, do it today and you'd have to pull in your, your other platforms, but what we did find confirmed more of the what we called our study was "The Rich Get Richer." Um, people who are already very connected offline are also highly connected online. So we didn't see a lot of evidence for the kind of lonely loser who is suddenly able to express their, you know, social life online. So we didn't see that. That's kind of a stereotype I think, uh, that's out there. Now, it could be, people have made the point that social media are not interchangeable, so Facebook for example is not an anonymous platform; you know who you're talking to. And so behavior there could be different than say in a chat room, where you have an avatar and people don't really know who you are. Um, that could be very different behavior and that could be more conforming to the lonely person compensating with online.

FR: Right, yeah. Like I feel like there's no way to say social media causes this, because it's just another tool that everybody uses in their own way.

LF: Yeah, I think what's really different to me about social media compared to your traditional media—it's a two-way conversation and I think we're still kind of sorting that out. When you look at United Airlines for example, you know. There's been some really exceptional examples of how an organization can use social media to make those connections with people, and then there's some tragic fails, you know, right? So we're still kind of figuring out how to deal with the two-way street. So when you look at college students and how they're using their social media, there's still a lot of a learning curve on the research side uh to figure out what the impact would be. The other main—and you've probably already run across this in your own research—the other main concern is that social media for some people um allows for a little more social comparison than we'd like them to have. Um, I think a certain amount of social comparison is necessary; you can't be thinking I'm the best thing that ever came on the planet and then you get out in the real world and there's like thousands of people doing at least as well as you are. That's a nasty reality check, so in that way, uh, the internet and um you know social media allow you to do a little reality check. But, at the same time a kind of constant reminder, you know, of people who might be prettier than you, or wealthier than you, or more successful than you, or more this or more that—that can make people kind of depressed, so they may actually pull back from their social um scene and, and social media is also somewhat alarmingly narcissistic in some regards, and we know that every time you think about the self, even if you look in the mirror—a lot of students don't know this—if you look in the mirror, you get depressed. Everything that is self-ref—you know, self-referent, um reduces mood. The way people get better mood is to think about other people. So if you use social media to reach out to others, um, that can reduce loneliness in a very real way, but if you're focused on yourself and oh, I only got this many likes on my latest, you know, profile picture, I am not a good person, then you crater, right? So it's how the individual is using it. I saw a really interesting article not too long ago—I can send it to you, um, on selfies, um, and how people were using selfies, and again, that seems really narcissistic, but when people use or posted photos with the intent to make their family and friends smile, like I want to share something with you because I think you'll like this, then they feel really good about themselves. When they were more narcissistic and self-oriented like, I'm great, here, I'm gonna you know, do this for myself, then mood went down. So we're still learning a lot.

FR: Definitely, like I totally didn't know that and that just makes me think about how, like, self-constructed everyone's profiles are and they're just building up this image of themselves. Does that just like get hit on them every single time they like change their—

LF: Yeah, I would say if you spend thinking about how I'm self-presenting, um, yeah that's, that's correlated with lower life satisfaction, with lower, lower um mood, is my guess. Because we know that, normally, um the brain spends about 50% of its day in focused problem solving, thinking mode. The other half is in what we call mind-wandering, or day dreaming, whatever you want to call it. So at least in my classes, I reassure my students that if they day dream, I know that's normal. We expect you to do that 50% of the day and that 50% may be in my class, I don't know. But, we're also thinking about our self when we're mind wandering. And so there is obviously some, I mean, we have to assume there's some survival benefit to that, um, kind of taking stock, who am I, where am I going, where have I been, what do I need to do next? Um, those are important reflections. Um, but we can't be spending a hundred percent of our time doing that because that will lead to depressed mood.

FR: Wow. That's really, really interesting.

LF: I like neuroscience, so.

FR: So like, how would you describe loneliness?

LF: Well, loneliness, um is a deficit—it's, it's like a motive, you know, it's like we have set points for body temp, we have set points for the fluid our body needs, for the nutrients our body needs, we apparently have a set point for the social activity we need. And it's genetically determined for the most part, so some people are just perfectly happy with one or two close friends, other people miserable unless they have six hundred. You know, so there's, there's like a range and that's pretty much set for you. Um, so what we're experiencing with loneliness is a drop where we are just like, you know your temperature drops or like your temperature goes up, you feel uncomfortable and all these mechanisms kick into gear to get you back on your set point. And the same thing happens with loneliness. Um, so we're experiencing less social activity than whatever our set point says is normal for us, and we respond to that deficit sometimes in not very productive ways. Um, what's interesting about loneliness is that it serves—in evolutionary terms, it's telling you that you're not as close to your social group as you need to be. And for the hunter-gatherer, which is like 90% of human history at least, that is bad news because if you're not connected with your social group, you're probably going to die. And so we immediately are going to experience that deficit as very unpleasant because it's a warning signal that will supposedly get us motivated to do something. But what we do is often go into a defensive mode, um, John Cacioppo of the University of Chicago has done quite a bit on loneliness and he describes lonely people as being on the outside of a fish ball. You know how fish school like, you know, little silver smelt things, and when a predator is nearby they, you know. And so the fish on the inside of the fish ball are nice and safe. The ones on the outside are not. And what he says is that loneliness, it kind of puts you on the outside of the fish ball. You're away from the safe, social center, and so you go into self-protective mode, and when we go into self-protective mode, we are not loveable. Right? When you think about it, it's like I'm—if I'm on defense, um, I may be less generous to the person next to me because it's all about me and my

survival now. Okay, I'm feeling under threat. And so, oftentimes, lonely people behave in quite opposite ways of what we'd like them to do to reengage with their social network. They become obnoxious and Roy Baumeister down at Florida State has done a lot of ethically-challenged studies where he initiates feelings of um, social exclusion in college students. I would not want to be in this study; he literally tells them, based on a personality test—it's all bogus, it's all deceptive—that you'll never have any really significant social relationships in your life, and I can't imagine. He says he can debrief people out of that, I'm going yeah right, okay, that would be devastating to me as a college freshman, but anyway, he does it. And then he sees, well, how generous are you, are you going to donate to a cause, are you going to help a student who drops their papers in the hall, and they don't. People who have been told that they face a lifetime of rich social connectivity are much nicer to be around, so that's why we got into the title "The Rich Get Richer." Um, and so, the key to people who find themselves on the outside of the fish ball is for them to know, this is what I have to really do to get back in. And it's not intuitive. Um, the best way to get back into the fish ball is to stop, number one, stop thinking about yourself, right? Just stop. And, and if that means no more selfies, no more profile updates, just stop doing that. Go out and volunteer to do something for somebody who's worse off than you, get a reality check. You know, feed a homeless person or teach a kid to read; do something that's not self-focused, but is selfless, yes? And you think okay, I'm out here on the edge of the, the fish ball, I'm in danger, why would I use my resources to help another person, right? But that's exactly what works. And so, um, we recommend that students who feel lonely, and they're going to number one, recognize that it's natural, they're supposed to feel like that. We've ripped them out of their home, dropped them into San Luis where they don't know a soul, and if they didn't react to that, there'd be something wrong with them, right? Okay? So it's normal. Uh, number two, um, it goes away with time. You know, uh, I wish we would get that message out to the first-years particularly; it goes away over time. It takes time to build social relationships, but you have to put yourself in harm's way. So find out where the people you tend to like hang out, right? If you know yourself reasonably well, you go, okay, so like, if you like really artistic people, uh, you may not want to go looking for friends in a biker bar, right? Okay, so you're going to find out where the people you like are hanging out and you're going to go to those club meetings, or you're going to engage in those activities, and just kind of hang out and over time, you'll do better. But, on a lot of people—and then the third thing is to, to make a conscious effort not to focus on the self, but to say thank you to your barista, you know, to really reach out to other people and, and think about them and how they're feeling, how was their day going, and not so much about how my day is going, but these ordinary people. And it can be a lot of fun actually, I—when I had more time in my Intro Psych class, um, we actually engaged in some of those activities, and the students came back with remarkable stories. I said, reach out to somebody who does something for you and you just kind of ignore it, right? And so one of my students, uh, he was a swimmer, uh, on Cal Poly's team, and he actually just started conversing with the janitor in his dorm who was in the elevator all the time. He always saw the guy, you know, coming and going, and he found out he'd been a competitive, a really good swimmer, in the day, right? And so not only did they have kind of this camaraderie after that, but my student said, yeah you know, as athletes, it's kind of hard to keep our eye on school because we're being paid basically to do this other thing. And he said, I really don't see myself as a janitor down the road, so maybe I better pay more attention to my academics, so it was a life lesson. He goes, the guy's really nice, but I don't want to be him, and so maybe I need to, you know—and they, they discussed that openly and so that was one story I remember a student telling me. Another, I said, well, you

know, again as a part of the reach out and—think about people who have made a real difference in your life and most of the time we just don't ever talk to them or go back and so people would go back and they'd contact, you know high school teachers when they were home, they'd look them up and just come back and the teachers would be just so amazed and happy and then they'd—the students were feeling really good about all of this and one guy—this was a little bit, I didn't intend this activity to work quite this way, but he had an elderly relative who was essentially paying his way through school, and he barely knew her. And so he made a point when he was home the next time to, you know, spend some time with her and tell her about school and I guess it was just incredibly meaningful, um, to both of them. But then I felt a little worse about it because she cut him this huge check, you know, and he was thrilled, of course, but I was like that wasn't the point. We're not hitting your relative up for more resources by being nice. But, the students would come back and start feeling good about themselves. And so that's not a perfect fix for everybody, but it's a starting point.

FR: Yeah, definitely. Um, so what—how do you think we can use social media to like make those connections? Can we?

LF: I think so. I've actually, when I look at—I'm not a massive social media user, um, I like Facebook only because I have adult daughters and I can kind of make sure they're still alive and I don't have to bug them, you know? It's like, that's very convenient. I would say, um, the most meaningful use of social media for me was when my oldest daughter was deployed to Iraq—and she's been twice—and the second time she had social media, of course, the first time she didn't, it was very reassuring to me to be able to see that she was okay and she was doing stuff and then she said, in her year of deployment, that there was much less interruption in her transition back to the U.S. than there had been the first time because she could kind of keep up. She knew who had had a baby and who'd gotten married and she could keep up with her friends and, and uh kind of keep that connectivity. So I think, used wisely, um it can build connectivity. I also have people I don't know in person that are my social media friends because we share and interest, say, in neuroscience and so I've actually met a lot of really, really good people that way. So I think it's all in the using, you know, you kind of have to put yourself out there and say here's what I do and here's—and, and my middle daughter who teaches social media at Louisville says, you know, she uses Twitter, um, to extensively, to build—and LinkedIn—to build more professional contacts and she actually has this whole network of people uh, she's interested in sports media, and she has this whole network of people, most of whom she's never met in person, but she considers friends, you know, because they have this shared interest and they go back and forth and, and discuss things that they're all interested in. So, to me, it like opens up and frees you from geography and time and place and, and, and I love it, personally. I think it's a very positive thing, but it can be abused. We know it can be abused.

FR: Yeah, definitely. Like, I feel like there's a point when you are using social media where it's fine and then you get lost in this whole, like, you don't want to log off because there's stuff constantly coming, it's like an endless stream that you feel like you have to catch up with, and so that's when I kind of feel like it becomes harmful.

LF: Well, I think it's like anything, moderation in all things is sort of my motto. And so, I think it is important, um, and I only know what I read because most of my friends are basically in my

peer group, right? Um, but I know a lot of people are worried that younger people, especially these little kids who are growing up, you know, they're, they're doing phones and tablets when they're like two, um, will they lose the ability to sit and have an intimate dinner with somebody and actually have a conversation. Uh, I think if we lose that ability, we've lost something very, very valuable to, to human experience, and so I think if we don't substitute social media for real interaction, we're okay. When social media suddenly takes the place of interacting with real people—some of my students find it very difficult to use the telephone to actually call somebody. Because we have tech issues with our—we, we use Top Hat for audience response and we use Cengage for our online homework. I said, don't be emailing these people. You'll never get an answer in time to get your homework done. Call them. What? Call them! Pick up the phone, talk to a real person. Yeah, that works. And so I see some of that reluctance already, and that shouldn't go into your social relationships. You have to talk to people.

FR: Yeah, definitely. Like, humans are like social animals—

LF: We are very social, yeah.

FR: I don't know how we can ever cut out that real human, human contact, you know, I feel like it's so natural—

LF: I don't know, we got robots and all kinds of—you will inherit an interesting planet. It will not be dull. I don't know if it'll be dark side or light side, but it will not be dull.

FR: Well, who knows where we're going! Um, are like, would you say loneliness affects how much or how students use social media, or like, use of social media affects loneliness—

LF: Probably both, probably both. Um, I think you can make a scenario for either one, like I'm feeling alone, my friends have all gone out without me, maybe I'll get online and see what's going on, and kind of, um—and people have always done that, I mean, the social media is kind of a new twist, but when you go back to more, uh, traditional media, I'm always fascinated by these parasocial relationships, uh, people have with celebrities. You know, if you, if you look at how they talk about a celebrity, they'll say, well Angelina, or Brad, kind of like they know these people and they don't, you know. They don't remotely know them, but they're taking that social behavior that's very normal and expressing it on something, a character in a soap opera, right? And that, to me, is just fascinating, I'd really like to study that more, um, but so there's, there's that compensatory, uh, theories come up, like we can use that to fill a gap. I don't know that that's a healthy thing to do in the long-term. Um, but um, again, what we found is that, um, they tend to be on parallel tracks: if you're really lonely, you tend to be less connected online as well. So maybe your resources for compensating for real loneliness aren't very good if you're already lonely. You know, it's kind of a spiral effect, which is sad.

FR: Yeah. It is kind of sad.

LF: It is.

FR: Um, so how can students, like take steps to like change their habits, so that they, their social media does contribute beneficially to their wellbeing?

LF: Well I think you have to identify the problem first. Alright, if you don't know what you're trying to change, that's not going to work. So, I would say, kind of an audit of your social media skills and what you're doing. Um, clearly if you have something in your head saying I use too much of my time on social media, I feel guilty about it, I feel uncomfortable about it, that's usually a pretty good sign that you should look at your use and I would just kind of diary it. You know, it's like I spend this much time here, and maybe take notes about what I should have been doing. You know, I had a midterm to prepare for and I spent all this time on social media instead. Um, what we would suggest like an applied behavior analysis is your looking at the antecedents of the behavior, the behavior itself and kind of the context in which it occurs, and the consequences. So if you diary what's going on with social media use as your target behavior, you'll have a richer understanding after a week or two. It's kind of like when you're going on a diet. People say, I don't know why I'm heavy, I don't eat anything, and then you start diary-ing it carefully and you go oh, I'm supposed to have 1800 calories and I have 3800 calories. And then you know what to do. So once you have the data, then you can set some goals, hopefully realistic ones. You know, just say maybe I want to cut down my social media use by X number of minutes. And then what you do is you set up some consequences, ideally we like reward, not punishment, um, but one of the quick things people can do, and it takes a little discipline, which not all of us have, but if you just restructure your day, like okay, I'm going to study first and then do social media. Or, for every hour I study, I'm going to give myself 15 minutes, and I'm going to set that clock and when that clock goes off, I go back to studying again, and then that clock goes off and I do social media for 15 minutes. You can always use a more preferred activity to reinforce a less preferred activity. Where people get into trouble is where people do the social media first and they never start studying. Right? Um, so what we want to do is to, to, to use some basic behavioral—we used to call it behavioral modification, but it's applied behavioral analysis—use some basic tools from that, um, to reorder, uh, the situation, then just give yourself a really nice prize when you've met a goal, you know, for a day or for a week, you know, just do something really nice for yourself. Hopefully that doesn't mean more social media, right?

FR: Yeah, definitely. Gotta cut it off. Um, just I like don't want to take up all of the time for your office hours, it's 11:42.

LF: Okay.

FR: So, I just want to know like, is there any last thing you think people should know about college students and loneliness.

LF: Again, it's just perfectly normal. Um, you don't need to feel like you're the only one experiencing that. You're not, everybody's kind of in the same boat. And that it does get better. It gets better during college. It really gets better after college. Um, so you just kind of have to hang in there and, and do the best you can, but not feel like I'm some kind of loser for feeling these feelings. You're not, um that's where everybody is. You'd be surprised who's sitting next to you in class, who has that or worse going on, right?

FR: That's totally like what I've been reading, like people who feel lonely feel alienated—

LF: Yeah.

FR: and like they're the only ones—

LF: No. They're not. Absolutely not. And actually, there's some research that says if you know that, and you know it gets better, it actually gets better faster. So if you can get that word out to your classmates, they actually will benefit from that knowledge. We try, but we can't reach everybody, we're not journalists. So you need to spread this, spread the word.

FR: Got it. Doing my best.

LF: You're going to save the world.

FR: So that's pretty much what I wanted to ask you.

LF: Great.

Appendix B

Interview Transcripts: Genie Kim

The following interview was conducted to gather insight from a professional with a background in student health and wellbeing, based on a set of topics that reflect the study's initial research questions.

Interviewer: Francesca Ricapito

Respondent: Genie Kim

Date of Interview: 5/22/17

Interview Transcription:

Francesca Ricapito: Um, so, could you just like start out by saying your name and spelling it for me please?

Genie Kim: Sure, my name is Genie Kim and it's G-E-N-I-E and then my last name is Kim, K-I-M.

FR: Rad.

GK: Yes, I passed the first test!

FR: You did it! And, you're the Director of Wellbeing and Health Education at PULSE?

GK: I am the Director of Wellbeing and Health Education for Campus Health and Wellbeing. So, Campus Health and Wellbeing is also known as the Health Center, um, but it encompasses Counseling, our medical health services, our health education program, and wellbeing. So I oversee our wellbeing and our health education program, which also houses PULSE, our peer health education program.

FR: Rad. Can you like tell me a little bit about some of the stuff you do day-to-day?

GK: Sure, so part of my job when I oversee our peer health education programs is a lot of curriculum development, training our peers to be certified peer health educators, um, to do learn by doing opportunity, where they are experts in their specific topics. So we have four topics that our peer health educators are trained in. We have our sexual health, mental wellbeing, substance abuse and use, as well as dietary analysis. So a lot of our work is going through the research and best practices and things that we should be educating our students on on our college campus to keep them healthy and safe during their time at Cal Poly.

FR: Rad.

GK: And then part of my job is also doing proactive presentations for members of Greek life, athletes, staff and faculty as well, so for wellbeing I look at the whole campus, all the way from

our students to our staff and faculty in making sure that the whole campus is doing well in terms of their health and wellbeing.

FR: That's awesome. Um, so like for those four sections, what would like loneliness fit under?

GK: It depends on how you define loneliness. So for students who might just be having trouble—having trouble fitting in, maybe it's their first time being away from home, um, transitioning to college can be difficult, loneliness can fall under kind of our emotional wellbeing category, so under our REAL team. If they would want to talk to a peer health educator about feeling lonely or finding ways to get connected to campus, that would be a really good resource for them, is to talk to our peer health educators that are under our REAL team that looks at mental health and emotional wellbeing. But, if the student might be exhibiting some signs of unsafe substance use, say they are lonely and they might be a little bit more depressed and maybe using and coping with substances, so that can look like drinking or using Adderall, or using any type of stimulant, then making an appointment with one of our peer health educators under the TLC team would be a really great choice to talk about use and habits and why they might be using substances.

FR: Totally. Um, so like what—how would you describe loneliness? So like, there's a couple different things you listed, but—

GK: Sure, a little bit more into detail? So, I think loneliness for individuals, especially students in the college-aged population affects everyone differently. So, it could be just trying to figure out what that sense of community is, um, do you have a sense of community on campus yet, whether it's with a student organization or a friend group, or finding out what your passion is with your major, loneliness can affect individuals based on that community aspect, but that social aspect too. So, if you don't have the skills necessary to connect with others in a way that feels comfortable for you, if you maybe have some social anxiety, then you might be looking at more mental health and emotional health issues. So there's kind of two different frames: there's that being comfortable, being social, I think that's hard for a lot of people, especially when you—when you transition into college, but then there's kind of that other avenue, when it might be a little bit more of a mental health issue that might be a barrier for individuals being socially kind of interactive with others. So there's kind of two different veins I think.

FR: And how important is that like social connectivity to student wellbeing?

GK: I think it's really important. It's a part of the whole holistic individual self—self, right? So, being connected to others helps give you a sense of purpose, helps you feel like you're meaningful in someone else's life, um, and it also contributes to your overall health and wellbeing when you're connected to others. So, whether it's connected to your community and you like giving back to your community, or doing different things, um, or just being connected with your friends and relationships is really important for somebody's self and wellbeing.

FR: Totally. Um, so how prevalent would you say loneliness is, like, on this campus?

GK: I don't know, like, the specific stats about loneliness on our campus. I'm sure that there are individuals that might be feeling lonely on our campus, um, and if it's those individuals that are

feeling lonely and isolated to the point where they might be having suicidal thoughts, that's the point where we definitely try to make sure that our students get connected somehow, whether it's through counseling services, or one of our peer health education programs, or some kind of student organization. Connectedness is very important for individuals who might be feeling that type of loneliness.

FR: Yeah, totally. Um, how often do you like see students that do talk about their loneliness? Do you ever?

GK: Um, there's definitely students who will come into my office, um, having difficulty connecting with others. So, just recently, this past weekend, I was doing a presentation on self-care, um, for students of color, for the students of color conference. And there's definitely students who don't fit the typical mold of what Cal Poly students look like, act like, um, and they feel lonely, right? They're a minority on the campus, and so sometimes there will be students who come into my office talking about I don't—there isn't even a place where I can get my hair done, right, because of my ethnic background. Um, I can't even go and find a place where I can feel connected, where I can go and get some food that is a part of my of my cultural heritage, right? So, it's getting them connected to mentors on campus, or, um, different cultural clubs and talking through what some of those options are, in order to get them connected to something or someone. So that's just an example of some of the students that I talk to.

FR: Totally.

GK: Mhm.

FR: And, um, what would you say is like the biggest like, I don't know, like, predictor of loneliness for college students? Is there like anything that comes to mind when you think like if someone exhibits this, like, they're more likely to be lonely?

GK: I don't know. I'm sure there's a lot of research that talks about what those predictors and indicators are, but I just don't know what those are.

FR: Totally. Um, what kind of education do you offer to help students connect to others well and find their communities?

GK: Absolutely. So, doing some proactive education about what resources are available. So, a lot of times individuals who might be feeling lonely or isolated might not feel comfortable talking to just anybody, right? So, being knowledgeable about what those confidential resources are for folks. So, the three confidential resources on our campus are Counseling Services, the Ombuds office over at the library, as well as Safer. And sometimes, being comfortable and knowing that what I disclose to somebody will be completely secret and they won't be divulging that information to anybody else can be helpful. Um, it also is helpful when there are just struggles that you might be going through and you might need help navigating some of that red tape and it think the Ombuds office is a really great, um, avenue for that. So, a lot of what I do is educate students about what resources are available for them. It's a big campus and there's a lot of different resources under Student Affairs, under Academic Affairs, and I think what we do a

really good job of on our campus is that it doesn't matter what resource you go to, those individuals are savvy enough to be able to get those students connected to somebody else that might fit them better, or, um, or direct them to where they need to go and I think that's one of the really beneficial things about our Cal Poly campus is that we all really care about our students. So, not only do I really talk about what resources are, but I also talk about what the warning signs are for loneliness and isolation and, um, if it's a more serious mental health issue, we talk about what that looks like, how to recognize that in a friend, so if you have a friend that might be exhibiting signs of loneliness, say they're a little bit more withdrawn, they don't want to go out with friends, um, they might be struggling or coping with using substances, educating their peers about what that looks like to and how to navigate getting them resources too is really important, because oftentimes, people themselves might not be open to accessing those resources, but say, if they did have an acquaintance or a friend that noticed that something was going on, they could intervene and say, hey, I've been to PULSE before and I've used the massage chair; let's go together, and let's talk about different ways we might get you connected to some support if you need it. Um, and kind of reducing that stigma for students. So if it is more of a mental health issue, reducing that stigma and acknowledging that they're not alone, that a lot of folks might feel that sense of loneliness or isolation, um, if they're on our campus. Because maybe, there just isn't something there for them yet. And that's something that our Dean of Students office really talks about is, if there isn't anything for you to be connected to, the beauty of our campus is that you can create it, right? And create what that looks like, to get connected to something and get connected to others.

FR: Rad. Um, how often would you say students do recognize loneliness in others?

GK: Um, I think our students are really smart and savvy about what that looks like. And our fellow—our Cal Poly students for some reason, by nature, are really caring individuals. Um, when students come in for their first year, we, through Week of Welcome, we try to get them connected to campus right away, right, and some folks just don't—they get overwhelmed by some of that, too, if they have exhibit—if they exhibit some of those feelings of loneliness and isolation. There's just some individuals who are predisposed to being a little bit more introverted, right? I'm actually really introverted, um, and sometimes I just need space to myself and that's okay. Um, but, we do a really great job of of, of kind of wrapping around those students when they come to campus right away through our orientation program. And then, as students start navigating their time here, we have so many professors and faculty, and staff members who really kind of pull those—pull all those students in to get them connected to, um, their passions. And that's one of the beauties of working on a college campus, is that there's so many young individuals who are very excited and trying to figure out work-life balance and trying to figure out what's next and what's coming up, and all of us are really a part of trying to develop students so that when they graduate, they're ready to figure out what next adventure is. What—Whatever you do in your professional career, what you do in your personal life, um making sure you have those interpersonal skills to be able to manage having a family and manage your finances and have a job. Um, so I think it's something that has kind of been ingrained in our Cal Poly students from right when they step onto campus is knowing what those warning signs are, how to take care of a friend, how to get connected, um, it's part of that Learn By Doing philosophy that's part of Cal Poly is, part of that is you learn how to take care of a friend too.

FR: The Mustang Way.

GK: Yeah, the Mustang Way!

FR: Um, so just kind of going like into more of the social media side, have you seen any connections between the ways students use social media and their overall wellbeing?

GK: Mhm. I think social media is a really interesting tool. I'm going to use it as a tool. There are students who are going to be entering college in the next year or two that have had access to social media or been a part of social media even when they didn't have the ability to post on social media, right? And I use the example of my son. My son's three. And I'm already posting pictures of him, right, to share with family and friends about his development and how he's growing, and I think it's really interesting that we're going to have kind of our first cohort of students who have been managing their social media platforms since the day they were born basically. Um, and—and in a way where they have control over it and they also don't have control over it, right? And so we have students now who are going to be entering college who have been in control of their own image and how they post and what they say about themselves via social media and I think it's interesting to think about the dichotomy between what you post on social media is who you are, right? But there are definitely other aspects of your life that you might not post on social media. Um, and two folks might have two different incongruent identities of what that looks like. So, on social media, it looks like everything is great and awesome and you're doing like all these hikes and you're going out to dinner, um, but there might be part of you that isn't included in that. Or some people are, are very congruent with that and share anything and everything about their life on social media, right? Um, so it's just interesting to see social media as a tool that is kind of developing our individuals or our personalities, um, with what that looks like. Like, someone's trying to come in, um, but um, even with our students now, I feel like some some folks are kind of regressing into not wanting to have social media. Sometimes it's a little bit of a distraction and for our students, there's so many other things they're a part of, whether it's extracurriculars or working, that there isn't enough time for social media. But, there's also different mediums too, right, through Instagram, through Snapchat, um, these little micro-minutes of sharing who you are and what you're all about in 140 characters or less or in a three-second photo, um, it changes the way an individual thinks about who they are and how they present themselves, and it's almost an instantaneous how do I do it as quickly as possible, um, with whatever filter it is, um, as a tool to market who I am. So I think that's where social media kind of plays with individuals and how it affects their wellbeing.

FR: How does this like constructed image of themselves affects like how other people perceive each other?

GK: Um, I think—that's a good question—I think, you know, when we're on social media and we're perusing through our social media and looking through others, it definitely changes our perception of who they are and I think what I was talking about before is what you put out there is what people see or view you as, right, and so as an outsider, looking into someone's timeline and seeing all the different life events—it's crazy to think of social media as “life events”—it gives people a painted picture of who that individual is, but I think what we lose is that

interpersonal connection with folks. Even to the point where we're not calling people on the phone anymore, right, and we're not actually meeting face-to-face for coffee. There's—I just saw an article about coffee shops like taking away the wifi so that it forces interaction with people, because that's what it was like before, you know? People would get together and meet new people in a coffee shop and talk about, like, oh I really like that jacket, where did you get that jacket, you know? And connecting with people on a real level. I think that's the difference between social media and that interpersonal connection, which I think we're losing a little bit of with all these different iterations of social media and being on our phones and being connected to technology, um, you lose that human interaction with others.

FR: Do you think, like, since social media's a tool, there's a way to use it so that you do like connect with others?

GK: Oh yeah, absolutely. I think it is a great tool for networking and getting connected with others, um, even through your professional development too. So using LinkedIn to actually get a job or do your research about a company or an organization, using Facebook to go on to that company's Facebook page, see what their mission and values are, see what they're posting so that you can align with their goals or not. I think there's definitely ways individuals can utilize it as a tool to their advantage, um, beyond just the interaction with friends on social media.

FR: Totally, um, like how can students start to change any detrimental habits that they have with social media?

GK: I think scheduling time for yourself is really important. So um, I'm totally, I do this too. When I'm at home I'll be on my phone and I'll be checking my email and I'm just not disconnected at all. Sometimes, you know, my job is 8-to-5, but sometimes I take work home and I'm still doing things at home from like 5-to-8, right? And I think it's important that we do schedule times for ourselves, not to be connected to technology. Um, making those meaningful connections, like we were just talking about what did I do this weekend? Well, I had some family time, actually. I took a moment to play with my three-year-old son and play with him on the ground actually pretend to make food in his kitchen, right? And it's so interesting to think of it that way, that I get so wrapped up in needing to respond to emails, and needing to—because I manage our social media for Campus Health and Wellbeing too—um, following the hashtags for this 31 Days of Wellness Challenge that we're doing, liking other peoples' posts, commenting on people saying great job, you're doing so great, drinking six to eight ounces of water, right? But then I get so wrapped up in that that my son will say Mommy please play with me. And I'm like just a minute, just a minute, I'm trying to finish what I'm doing, right? And on Sunday, I recognized that I was kind of getting really stressed out because I was trying to do all of these things just on my phone as a tool, that I put my phone down and I stopped and I sat down on the ground with him and I actually pretend played, and it felt amazing. It was so great to pretend to sip out of a teacup and have him pour me tea and see how he was developing creatively with wanting to use all these different things to make soup, um. So I think it's really important for folks to schedule time away or making sure that there's boundaries for you um when you're using technology and social media, um. And even taking time to call somebody or write somebody a letter. It changes the way that you communicate with one another too. So just making sure that there's a balance there and having some boundaries.

FR: Yeah, I totally recognize what you mean when you said it's so easy to get caught up in social media because it's literally an endless stream.

GK: Right.

FR: So it's like, how do you keep up with that if you're not on it all the time.

GK: Right.

FR: Pretty wild.

GK: It's like the rabbit hole, you know, in *Alice and Wonderland*. You go in and then it's—you just, there's all these different layers and there's different areas where you could, oh, that's a neat article, or this kind of came up in social media, and then you go down that path and then that triggers something else and then you're just kind of sucked in.

FR: Yeah, like I feel like there's this, like you could go really deep into a social media, or you could check all your different sites, but either way, like there's always more being posted all the time.

GK: Yup, absolutely.

FR: And, I think it's funny what you said about the coffee shop before, because I actually read this study about how apparently people who rate like higher in loneliness um go out to like coffee shops and public restaurants more often to like try and make that connection, but I was thinking like when I'm at a coffee shop, I see people on their phones and on their computers.

GK: Right, by themselves, in this little bubble, working on what they're doing.

FR: Yeah, so I need to check the year on that to see if that's like even accurate, because like, as long as there's wifi, you are connected to this whole other thing, plugged in—

GK: Right. And it's one of those things where, if you were to go on a hike, say good morning to someone, and saying hello to somebody and feeling that—giving yourself permission to do that too, that you don't just kind of have to avert your eyes and keep walking, right? Um, and it would be interesting to maybe look into some other research articles about our culture versus maybe European cultures, or other cultures, where maybe you're not just so tunnel-vision-ed and not just wanting to do what you're doing and your tasks, but connecting with others like your neighbors or going to the park, or going for a walk and saying hello to others. I think we get really caught up—and it's really funny, me and my husband were talking about um, that that's kind of the American Way, right? It's, if you don't work hard, you can't—you have to work hard to achieve the best that you can, right? And it doesn't matter who's in your way, um, but you're going to overcome that person or trample that person to get to where you want to be, right? Um, so it's just different to think of culture that way and the way that we interact with other human beings.

FR: Yeah, totally. It's like a perspective shift! Um, so what do you say—would you say to students who do feel lonely, because like loneliness itself like can be like this natural emotion, you know—

GK: Yeah.

FR:—that people just get, but then there's also, it can get like dangerous if people like act on it—

GK: Absolutely.

FR:—so like what should students do when they feel lonely?

GK: I think for individuals who are feeling lonely, not feeling connected to anything, um maybe I think it's all about perspective, and trying to figure out what it is about that loneliness for you. Is it that you are a student of color and you come to Cal Poly campus and you don't see anybody that you identify with in our community? Um, that aspect would be more of, okay where can we figure out where those connections are, and if there aren't those connections for you, maybe this isn't the right location-wise for you, right? And I don't say that in a way that means like oh, you don't belong here, so you shouldn't be here, it's more of, what are your passions, what are you interested in, and how do you find connections within those passions and interests? Um, and if it feels like the environment that you're in is like inhibiting that loneliness, then making a change might be the best for you and your health and wellbeing, um, and that's okay. Not everybody who comes to Cal Poly is going to feel like this is the right place for them, if it's the right fit. Um, but if it is the right fit and the right environment for you, figuring out what you're passionate about whether it's journalism, or um art, or architecture, and figuring out ways where you can utilize that passion to get you connected to others is really important. Um, and I think that's just part of our professional development too. It goes into how do we develop ourselves as individuals uh for our health and wellbeing to, to make the most of where we're at and what we're doing, right? And I think getting that education, and continuing to evolve and develop and, and increase or feelings of connection and happiness to certain things or aspects. So um my husband's a musician so he gets really connected to playing music, right? And that's—he can play music with others, and that's connection, but playing music by himself also makes him connected to his instrument too, right? So thinking about the way you think of loneliness and connection doesn't mean that you have to be connected to other individuals, if that's what—if that's one of the barriers for you, it's being connected to whatever medium that you feel comfortable with and being connected to. Does that make sense?

FR: Totally. Like, what would you say, like you wake up in the morning and you're feeling lonely, what's like a daily first step that you can take to becoming more connected with like an object or a person or anything like that.

GK: Well one of the things that help, one of the skills that I think helps is finding those positive affirmations that work for you, right? And so, whether it's I am strong and I belong at Cal Poly because my like—because I am worth being here, right? Something else could be I am—I um, sorry, phone, we'll wait.

FR: We're all good.

GK: Um. And then writing down what brings you joy, so I think what's important is writing down and making lists of things that do make you happy and bring you joy, whether it's um, if you have a pet, you know, talking about how much you love that pet and how you want to cuddle that pet and um take care of that pet. Or it's I like spending time making food for myself, right? Food that I know is going to enrich my body and make me feel good, taking time to be in control of those things that you have, um. Acknowledging that you're good at stuff is really important, so acknowledging that you might be really great at journaling or writing down all the different things that are going on for you. Figuring out what those positive things are for you that make you connected to others or yourself. Being in connection with yourself is really important. Can we pause for just one minute?

FR: Yeah, of course.

[GK talks to someone on phone]

FR: Um, that was pretty much all of my questions. I just wanted to know is there any last thing that you think people should know about loneliness, social media, how to connect, anything?

GK: Um, I think the most important thing is that if you are feeling lonely to the point where it's, it's inhibiting your ability to go to class, um to feel connected to others, to feel connected to yourself, that that would be warning signs that you might need support for yourself, whether that's talking to a counselor, or an academic advisor, or one of our peer health educators, that's one of the things that I want to make sure that students know, that they're not alone and that they don't have to feel alone in that kind of endeavor. I think that sometimes social media, when you see or compare yourself to other individuals that might be your friends from high school or your friends in college and um seeing all the great things they're doing, it can be overwhelming sometimes, and just know that you don't have to compare yourself to others. It's not a competition. Each individual has their own adventure and their own experiences and that's all that matters, is recognizing your strength and your abilities and that it's your journey and your path; it's not anybody else's, right? So I think that's what I would recommend when thinking about being lonely and social media and all those other things.

FR: Awesome.

GK: Yeah.

FR: So that's all I have.

GK: Okay.

FR: Cool!

GK: Thanks.

FR: Thank you so much!

GK: Yeah, absolutely, that was fun!

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts: Madi Burgess

The following interview was conducted to gather insight from a student attending California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo based on a set of topics that reflect the study's initial research questions.

Interviewer: Francesca Ricapito
Respondent: Madi Burgess
Date of Interview: 5/17/17

Interview Transcription:

Francesca Ricapito: So, just like tell me something about yourself.

Madi Burgess: Okay.

FR: Anything that comes to mind.

MB: Should I start with the name kind of thing, or no?

FR: Okay. Yeah, start with your name and spell it for me please.

MB: Okay. Um, my name is Maddison Burgess—full name, but I go by Madi. M-A-D-I. B-U-R-G-E-S-S. Um, something about me, oh gosh. It's hard to keep eye contact. Um, I really like film, I'm really into film. I'm a part of the film club and um, I think it's a really cool means of communication. Yeah, that's something about me.

FR: And like by the way, you don't have to like be looking at my face the entire time. Just talk like however you would like normally talk, but just like you don't have to look into the camera.

MB: Rad, okay, cool.

FR: You can, if you want, you know?

MB: Yeah, totally, totally.

FR: What do you like think of Cal Poly?

MB: Yeah, um, Cal Poly's rad. I would say this was not my first choice of school at all, so I really came in with no expectations because um, I just I don't know, I wasn't really sure about it, um. I think the area around it, like SLO, um, is probably my favorite part. The school itself is sometimes, I feel like a disconnect sometimes. Um, I think that there are a few issues, especially with like forcing you to choose your major, um, things like that but, I think overall I'm pretty happy here at Cal Poly. I like it, yeah.

FR: What does a day in the life of Madi look like?

MB: Yeah. So I wake up to my messy room. It's pretty messy, um. Don't usually make breakfast, uh, my mom would be mad if she heard that but um, yeah kind of usually in a rush in the morning. I'm not really a morning person. Then, I get to the bus, running. I get to school. Usually I have morning classes. I like morning classes, so I'll do that, um. Sometimes I'll go to the lib and hang out with friends; that's kind of where we socialize, a lot less studying than socializing, um. Have a lot of alone time in between classes, um and I can like choose to hang out with friends, but sometimes I just choose to hang out by myself and then I'll usually hopefully get lunch, hopefully. Um, usually in the evenings I have another class, like I have photography right now, which is six to nine. Then I'll go back. I live in Valencia, so I'll go back, usually hang out with one of my best friends and then call it a day. Go back to my apartment, maybe go to bed before midnight, probably not, but that's a day.

FR: That's quite a day.

MB: That's a day.

FR: Like, what do you like to do when you're like by yourself?

MB: Yeah. Um, I like to listen to a lot of music. I think that's my—I'm kind of a music addict, like the more I can get, like the more I seek after it. Um, I used to run a lot. I don't really run as much, but I really enjoy running. I did cross country in high school. By myself... I watch a lot of Netflix. I watch a lot of documentaries, I watch a lot of films because I'm a film fan. Um, a lot of lounging on the lawns at Cal Poly, that's a spot. Yeah, just stuff like that.

FR: Like, when, like in your own mind do you feel like you crossed the line, like between being alone and being lonely.

MB: Yeah, that's a tough line. Um, I think for me, I've never had a problem being alone. Um, I enjoy like me time, I've worked a lot on like having me time, um, because I'm super social and like I always want to be friends, so I've worked a lot on that. I think loneliness for me happens more like when I'm alone in my apartment. Definitely I have two roommates, but I don't really see them and so uh, my living situation is more of like a catalyst for those loneliness feelings because, uh, at home I have a supportive family, they're always around, I have a nephew so it's like I definitely, um, feel that lack of community. But I think the main switchover, if I can think of a difference, it's where I start to, like, go internal. I quit seeing the world around me and like interacting with it and I start to like get into my own mind. And that's where I think I see the switch from hey I'm just hanging out alone, to, like, now I'm lonely and I like, I'm like hyper aware of that.

FR: Yeah, totally. And like at least like when I'm at home, like there's no—like if you know your roommates aren't going to be home—there's like no chance of you like running into other people as like a distraction.

MB: Yeah.

FR: You know? And so like it's so easy to get like caught up—

MB: Yeah

FR: —in like your head.

MB: Definitely, yeah.

FR: Um, so would you say like when you're at your apartment, is the time when, like, loneliness hits you the most?

MB: Yeah, I would say so. There are times when I'm with other people and I'm just lonely, but, uh, I would say the majority of the time it's like when I'm at home, yeah.

FR: Like, what's it like when you are around other people—

MB: Yeah.

FR: —and you like start being lonely?

MB: Yeah, it's definitely a new experience for me, um. My whole life, as I said, I've been like very social, so being around people is like that distraction, like that fuels me. So kind of—it's definitely a conflict, because I want to badly to invest in these people that I'm around, um. But I feel like I'm just like either not connecting, even when they're like my best friends, or I just feel like a lack of, I don't know, it's just a very hard, hard thing to distinguish, it's not very tangible. Um, but it definitely feels like this step back, like removal from my life and I'm like sitting a little bit on the sidelines watching it. I think that's where I could maybe distinguish it, yeah.

FR: That's really interesting.

MB: Yeah.

FR: Um. Shoot I had something in my head. Oh yeah. So like I've been reading and like doing a lot of research on loneliness right now, and, um, shoot, it's like flitting away in my mind. Oh yeah, so like, loneliness is just like another feeling, like any other feeling, right? And so like, it's natural and it's not necessarily like a bad thing. I was reading about how, if you like experience loneliness, you like really cherish all the times where you do feel connected. So like, do you find any sort of connection with that at all?

MB: Yeah. I would say so. I'm definitely not of the belief that loneliness is bad in all senses. In just like all, any other harder emotion needs to be felt and makes you grow as a person when you do, but yeah um, definitely cherish the moments where like you're connecting with someone and you're like dang, this is rad, like that's awesome. I think, yeah, those are, those are more—I'm definitely more able to appreciate those when I have the contrast of I know what it feels like

when I'm just completely not able to do that. So I think that there might be some truth to that in my own life, yeah.

FR: Totally. And so like, so there's like different types of loneliness that I was reading about that I'm like, was just kind of interested in.

MB: Yeah.

FR: And so like emotional or intimate loneliness is like a feeling of isolation and like feeling unable to like share intimate aspects of yourself with like people around you. Social loneliness is actual, like, isolation, and like not having like those social networks at your like resource to reach out to. And existential loneliness is like feeling alienated and like helpless, like nothing you do, like, matters, even if you like are around people.

MB: Gotcha.

FR: Like, do, like, any of those like kind of like pop out as like most relevant?

MB: Yeah. I would say probably the intimate one. I've always struggled with vulnerability and being able to like really share those harder things, especially with my close friends, which can sometimes cause issues, but, yeah, that um, feeling of like I can't quite get there with someone on that level, um, definitely causes loneliness and I'm definitely, um, a type of person that wants to invest, especially in individual relationships. So when that's happening and I feel blocked myself, it's frustrating, because I want so badly to like do that, but I just feel like, eh, can't really do it right now.

FR: I totally get that. Like, especially when you're like meeting all new people in college—

MB: Yeah.

FR: —like, what year are you?

MB: I'm a second year. Yeah.

FR: Yeah, it's like when you come here, it's like, you came from having these such good friends in high school and now you're trying to like rebuild all of these connections again—

MB: Yeah.

FR: —and it's like, how do you distinguish that point where you know that you can like be your vulnerable self with someone?

MB: Yeah, it's a tough line.

FR: Um, so like, when you are, like, feeling lonely by yourself in your apartment, how is that like different from the loneliness that you feel when you're around people and you just can't quite connect?

MB: Yeah, um, I think when I'm alone, it's more pervasive. It's like all aspects of my life, and then I start to think, you know, like what's wrong with me, I'm feeling all this loneliness, um, I think it's definitely more intense, like, I feel it, you know what I mean. And, and there's no accountability, there's no one, like, that I have to pretend to be okay for, so I think I'm able to feel it more strongly, if that's how you say it. And, um, yeah, it definitely becomes more personal, like the loneliness is due to a character flaw in me or something like that. Whereas, with people, when I'm around people, I start to like, if I'm lonely around people, it's starting like why am I not connecting with this specific person, or like, and I still have to put on that mask of like okay, of not like letting the people around me see that I'm like feeling this way. So, like, it's definitely a little bit of a different experience, but like the same internal gut feeling I think is pretty similar.

FR: Yeah. Like, are you able to describe that feeling?

MB: Um, it's very physical sometimes. It's like, it's almost like a bit of a dread, but it's a little different. It's like a, yeah, I can't, it's kind of just like people say pit in their stomach, but it's just like a little different for me. It's just like, it's kind of like pressure, like tightness and, like dread, I think is loneliness for me, yeah.

FR: It's like, it's so hard to put your finger on—

MB: Yeah.

FR: —things like feelings.

MB: Yeah, yeah.

FR: Um, have you found anything that you can go to or reach out to to alleviate your loneliness whenever it hits?

MB: Yeah, I used to, I mean, music is a big one for me. Sometimes it perpetuates it more, depending on what I choose to listen to. Um, I think I used to watercolor actually, which is like really fun, and I'm not an artsy person at all, like I was the sport person, so like doing watercolor was like a whole new thing, but that was really cool. Um, I don't really do that as much anymore, but that was a fun little thing, um. I definitely have a few key people that I can like reach out to and be like, hey, this is what I'm feeling and they like understand, and so that's a super cool resource that I have. But, yeah. A lot of times, just gotta sit in it for a while and hope that it goes away, that's kind of, yeah.

FR: Totally. Um, so like, kind of going into the social media side of it, are like, are you pretty active on social media?

MB: Yeah, yeah. I have Snapchat, Instagram, all those, all that jazz, yeah. All the, all the apps, yeah.

FR: Are your, like, personal—how important are your personal profiles to you? Like, the image you have—

MB: Gotcha.

FR: —on your Facebook profile and what you post on Snapchat.

MB: Yeah. Um, I say they're less important to me now, but they still I think have a weight. I don't post like a ton. I'm more of like a viewer of other things, but, um, definitely making look like I'm happy all the time, doing adventurous things, that's kind of like the image that I portray, um, and I think if that were to change, I'd probably be a little like nervous about that. So I would say there's a little bit of importance that I put on keeping that, like, when my friends from home are looking at my social media and stuff like that, I don't want them to think that there's anything not, like, anything wrong going on, yeah.

FR: What do you think would happen if like you did post, like, an indication of being lonely on social media? Because it's such a thing too, like to have, I don't know, the perfect, happy life on social media.

MB: Yeah. Um, I think it has a lot to do with my own pride. So that'd be a huge hurdle, um. I don't know, I have a, do you know what finstas are? Fake instas, yeah, I have one of those and there was one week last quarter where all of my friends were getting sick and there was just like a lot of things happening, and I did make a post on more like people that are having a rough time. So it was somewhat indicative of me as well and I think my closer friends knew that, but that was like a huge deal. And it was on my finsta, so only like my close friends were following me and, um, but it was more for other people, like reaching out to other people than saying like what I personally am feeling, which I feel like is a theme in my life. I'm normally asking others—so, like my normal Instagram and my normal Facebook that would take a huge amount of, like, courage, and like vulnerability, that, I don't know, it would be really, really scary to do that, for sure, to let down the mask and like let people see.

FR: Yeah, right.

MB: Yeah.

FR: Like, even though it is a natural thing and, like, you get the feeling that other people—other people have to be lonely too, right?

MB: Yeah.

FR: But, you don't feel like they are, when you yourself are lonely.

MB: Yeah, definitely. Looking at, you know, comparison, um, is kind of like the worst thing that's come out of social media, at least in my mind. Like, it's so easy to go through and like, look at all these adventures they're going on, look how happy, and then I look at my own feed and like I've had friends tell me, they're like I look at your social media, you look like you're having such a great time and that's when it really, it hit me, I was like, nobody is actually like what they're portraying in their social media, and so, I think for me to post it, I would definitely feel like, kind of like weak, people don't want to hear this, they don't want to see that you're lonely, they want to see that you're like having a great time and stuff like that, so, it's kind of, yeah.

FR: Yeah. It's like the same when you're putting on a smile when you're hanging out with other people.

MB: Yeah.

FR: I don't know. How much of it is even like for ourselves—

MB: Yeah.

FR: Or is it like more other people?

MB: Yeah, like, my biggest thing is that I don't ever want to be a burden. So it's like, if I'm the Debbie Downer, in like the friend group, like, eh, they may not want to hang out with me, and I definitely, it's very hypocritical, because when other people are like the Debbie Downer, they're really like having a hard time, it's like this, what's wrong, hey, let's hang out, let's see what's going on. It's not like a social shunning or anything like that. So I know that that might not necessarily be the case, but there's still this fear of like being that person that's not okay, you know? And I feel like it's so much motivated for what others think, or what others, I perceive them to need or want. And I don't think the smile's ever for me. I don't think so.

FR: Damn, that's so true though. I don't know. Because, like, I don't know, you can't see your own smile.

MB: Yeah.

FR: It just kind of happens when you're happy.

MB: Yeah.

FR: Um. So like, like how often do you directly communicate with other people on social media, like, through like comments, or like direct message, or like something that's like pointed specifically at another person?

MB: I'd say not that much. It's usually just for my close friends. Like, if I see their Snapchats story, I'll like be like, woah, cool. You know, like just a quick chat or like a comment on like

some of my friends' posts, like well that's a cool pic, like you know nothing very, um, I don't think I do too much direct stuff, but, kind of just a scroll person.

FR: Um, like, when you're just scrolling, what kind of thoughts are going through your mind?

MB: Uh, oh man. It really depends on the day, I guess, um. A lot of it is just like looking at what other people are doing and being like, oh, that's cool, that's awesome, alright, that looks fun, um. But, I'd say, um, sometimes it's a lot like, man, I wish, I wish I had that kind of, like, friendship, or I wish I was doing that fun thing instead of like sitting here on my bed or something like that, um. I, yeah, I don't know, it's definitely, it's more of a form of escapism for me. It's like to get me out of my daily, I'm just going to go like invest in other peoples' lives while my life here is just like eh. Yeah.

FR: How often are you on those sites?

MB: Um, I actually had to recently delete Instagram, um, because I like self-correcting. I catch myself on Instagram so much, um I definitely, I go on, I'm just going to read Humans of New York—I love their Instagram—so I'm just going to go read those, those are really cool, it's not a big deal. And then I'm like deep into the Instagram pit, like five accounts in, you know, and I'm just like what am I doing, like it's thirty minutes later and I'm like, I like look up and I just like, it's kind of scary, so I'd say a decent amount per day. Even on Snapchat, like just a quick scroll through friends' stuff, like I catch myself, like, fifteen minutes later, twenty minutes later, just in the exact same position, looking at the screen.

FR: Why do you think that is? Like, I do the same thing, like, you know those little cooking videos on Facebook?

MB: Yes!

FR: I—

MB: I get obsessed with those.

FR: Obsessed! I'm just like, wow.

MB: Yeah.

FR: Like, it's so satisfying to watch. Like why, why do you think it's so easy to get, like swept away?

MB: Yeah. It's kind of addictive, I don't know. It's such an easy form of that satisfaction, or like, I don't know, even feeling connected to something. It's like, you're not really connected, but it's like it's on your screen and it's there and it's better than sitting there and it's better than sitting there, so it's just like, it's that instant, like, stimulus of like, I don't know, I just get addicted to it, which is scary.

FR: Yeah, it's like this compulsion of like the instant gratification.

MB: Yeah. Definitely, yeah. Yeah.

FR: Um. Something like popped into my mind, but I forgot what it was.

MB: No.

FR: Um, so, this is a funny one.

MB: Good, good.

FR: At night, when you look into the sky, what do you think about?

MB: Man. Um. Usually how I want to go to sleep, because I'm exhausted, no, I, I really think a lot, I'm definitely very self-critical as I think most people at this stage in their life are, or if you're at college, this tends to be a theme, but, I kind of just think about things that maybe went wrong, or areas in my life that necessarily aren't the best, that could use work on, um. And that can be a really healthy thing, but I think sometimes it takes it to an extreme level. Or like, normally my sister would be in the other room and something like that, and she's not. Or you know, like thinking about what my other friends are doing or stuff like that, it just like, yeah, I don't know, it just like worrying myself into a pit or just thinking about where I could be except for in that spot.

FR: How has your college experience so far compared with like what you thought it was going to be?

MB: Yeah, um. I don't know. Like I said, coming in I didn't have that many expectations, but definitely thought it would be, at least living situation, more social, um, and I made the choices that I did for the living situation out of, like, what I felt was an obligation, so that kind of makes it a little harder, but, yeah, I definitely—no, never saw myself in this place, not necessarily in a bad way. I mean, I think everything that's happened, um, has helped me grow as a person, like I think it'll be great lessons later on, but I definitely didn't think I'd be spending as much time alone, as many meals alone—that's a big thing for me. Like, at home, I always wanted to eat with family or friends, and like, here I'm by myself when I actually do eat. In the off chance that I have time, I'm by myself, or yeah, I don't know. I've definitely—I've changed my major a lot, so never saw that coming. Never saw this kind of like totally different path than I thought would take, but it's, it's okay, still going. Trying to have fun, I'm still here.

FR: Awesome. Um, like, so many people feel lonely, and when they're feeling lonely, they don't really recognize in their minds, that like, either there are other people there, or it's like okay to like be lonely sometimes. So like, do you have, not like advice, or words you have for people who are, like, feeling lonely?

MB: Yeah, totally, yeah.

FR: Or, like, even if you have advice—

MB: Yeah.

FR: —or if it's like go with it.

MB: Just go with it, I don't know. Um, yeah, I mean I would say it's hard to address that. Like, be aware and don't be afraid of admitting that you're feeling lonely, even to yourself—I feel like that's the hardest part because there's a lot of pride sometimes with that, and like no, no, no, I'm not. Um, but if that's not the case, um, I would say reaching out, it's really scary, um, definitely like allowing yourself to feel that sometimes, but reaching out to a friend is sometimes, like, the coolest thing you can do, but is really hard. Um, even if you feel like you don't have many friends or like close friends, um, sometimes people will surprise you. So, yeah.

FR: Um, do you, like, have any last things that you, like, want—think people should know? Or you want to say and, like—

MB: Yeah.

FR: —make sure they really hear?

MB: Um, yeah I'd just be like, don't be afraid to, to feel those darker feelings, um, and don't be ashamed of them. Like, it's—we're all human, we're all feeling them, especially at this time of college. Like, nobody is as—having as great of a life as is showing on their social media, um. So keep that aware. Be okay with vulnerability. Um, yeah, just, yeah, go with it.

FR: Go with it, you know.

MB: Go with it.

Appendix D

Interview Transcripts: Lisa Haight

The following interview was conducted to gather insight from a student attending California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo based on a set of topics that reflect the study's initial research questions.

Interviewer: Francesca Ricapito
Respondent: Lisa Haight
Date of Interview: 5/30/17

Interview Transcription:

Francesca Ricapito: Um, so like could you just start by saying your first and last name and spelling it for me please.

Lisa Haight: Yes. Um, my name is Lisa Haight, and that's L-I-S-A H-A-I-G-H-T.

FR: Rad, you did it.

LH: Nailed it!

FR: Um, so like tell me a little bit about yourself. Anything that comes to mind.

LH: Alright, well I'm a graduating Political Science major. I was involved in Cal Poly's new student transition programs, so I worked here almost every summer since I've been here. I love Cal Poly and I fell in love with SLO when I came. Um, I am the youngest of five children in my family, but my family is kind of the people that take everyone in, so I've always been constantly surrounded by a large number of family members. Um, yeah I really enjoy things like reading and being outdoors and exercise and spending quality time with people, I guess.

FR: Oh my god, that's so sweet.

LH: Is that okay?

FR: Oh my god, yeah, that's great. Um, what was it about SLO and Cal Poly that like made you fall in love with it?

LH: Well, to be honest, on my first tour here, my parents hated it and it's kind of funny because we were walking around and I just noticed all of the people and the way they were interacting with each other and so one of like the subtle hints I picked up on was there was always someone opening the door for me and there was always someone opening the door for the next person and people constantly made eye contact and listened to me and smiled, even when I was just on a tour, so that's something that I actually didn't get in high school, which I really appreciated coming to Cal Poly and the last thing that my tour guide said that if she had to compare schools

to Cal Poly, then it would be like Disneyland. And so, I turned around and I was like mom, I'm coming here.

FR: Oh my god.

LH: Because I love Disneyland, yeah.

FR: That's so sweet. Wait, sorry.

LH: Yeah, you're fine, I don't know what happened.

FR: [About changing the camera's memory card:] I'm just going to put a new one in.

LH: Okay.

FR: Could you say your name and spell it for me like one more time please.

LH: Yeah, no worries. My name is Lisa Haight and it's spelled L-I-S-A H-A-I-G-H-T. Nailed it.

FR: Um, could you tell me a little bit more about like when you first came to Cal Poly and how that felt and like—

LH: Yeah. Um, so I was actually really excited to come to Cal Poly. Um, I had some close friends in high school, but I think I was just ready for a change of pace and I was kind of ready to get out and coming to college was one of, I think, the biggest hurdles because no one in my family had ever been to college. And so, I was kind of the baby and I was always pushed along and very much driven by my siblings and my family members, and so I always knew that college was hopefully going to be in my future and finally making it, I was just very excited to come here and I was ready to go. And so, it was sad leaving my mom and dad, but my mom was like crying and I remember just being like, okay, like, I'll see you soon, like I was just so excited and so proud honestly to be accepted at this university and to get this opportunity in general.

FR: That's such a big deal, too. Oh my gosh.

LH: Thank you. I appreciate that.

FR: Um, so what's a day in the life of Lisa look like.

LH: Ooh. Um, mostly school, so I'm actually not in too many units right now, but, um, I have class Monday through Thursday. I work usually twice a week. I'm an intern for a civil court judge at the San Luis Obispo Superior court, um, so I do some work for him and his clerk. And I spend a lot of time with my roommate and one of my best friends, Ashley, but um, normally I will spend at least a couple hours during my week doing something fun or interactive with some of my close friends, whether that's going on a hike, or just relaxing and watching a Netflix show or going to Farmer's, like anything, um. I just kind of really enjoy spending time, especially now

that I only have three weeks left, I'm trying to spend a lot of quality time with the people that I care about. So.

FR: Totally.

LH: Yeah.

FR: And that's so important. Like, what I'm going to miss most about this place is all the people I've met.

LH: Yup, that's exactly what made me fall in love with this school.

FR: Um, so just going into the loneliness part, what, what is loneliness for you?

LH: Um, for me, I think loneliness has a lot to do with not being okay being by yourself. Um, I think it's kind of different in terms of being independent because I still value myself as an independent person, but I think that oftentimes, if you feel lonely, you feel like there might not be people that understand you, or can kind of resonate with what you're feeling and it's hard because, logically, you want to tell yourself, you know, other people do go through similar things and, you know, people can understand you and there are still a lot of people that I know that love and care about me and support me, but I think loneliness just comes to terms when I feel like I don't have someone that I can connect with and oftentimes if I'm not busy or distracting myself, I think it kind of hits me those times the most. Does that make sense?

FR: Totally, totally, totally.

LH: Yeah.

FR: And what does that feeling feel like. Like, it's hard to put into words, but like—

LH: Yeah. I guess it feels kind of empty. Like, I've described it actually to my ex-boyfriend when I started feeling that way, that I felt like I wasn't full anymore. And he actually asked me to tell him one thing that made me full every single day, so that kind of helped with those feelings, but, yeah it's like, it's kind of like a feeling of emptiness. It's a feeling like I'm not a whole person and, you know, I don't know what exactly will complete that and I don't know if it's other people and those other people are lacking, or if it's just myself and not being a fully complete person on your own is kind of crippling in a way.

FR: Totally. And like, where do you think you cross the line between, like, being alone, being by yourself, and being lonely?

LH: I think it comes all within your mentality, because, you know, I can have moments where I am alone and I am fully fine and I'm functioning and happy and capable of doing everything by myself, but there are times, whether I'm upset or if I'm happy, and I feel like I can't share that with anyone else or I feel like I have no one to turn to and it's really hard sometimes because I know I have people that, like, I can count on or go to, but the feelings of loneliness just kind of

stem from, you know, my own self-doubt and my own ideas about my worth and my value and not knowing if people, you know, care about me as much as I care about them or, you know, want me around as much or things like that. So, I think it just kind of comes with your mental health and, you know, how you view your situation and yourself independently, but it's a lot of blurred lines between trying to explain to myself logically that I'm not alone, but then contrasting those with the feelings of just being alone is really hard.

FR: Totally. Like, can you think of one particular instance where you, like, thought to yourself that you were feeling lonely and you didn't know, like, how to get out of that, like, little loneliness hole?

LH: Yeah, so I used to ride the Amtrak a lot and I have pretty bad anxiety, and so oftentimes, when I'm on the Amtrak, you'll lose service for certain amounts of time or things like that, and so I remember one time specifically, I was going up to visit my boyfriend, which is ironic, um, and he went to school in Sonoma and we're not together anymore, but I used to constantly go up and see him and I just has a moment where I just broke down and I started crying because I feel like the people that I cared about had all slowly started disappearing and, you know, removing themselves from my life or something ended up happening and I just couldn't do anything about it and it was so hard because I know that I was going to see someone that cared about me and, you know, I have friends and I have family members, but it's just when you get stuck honestly and when you start feeling alone, it's kind of hard to crawl back out of that hole, especially without like the help or comfort of other people around you. And so I was alone, literally on the Amtrak and then, like, internally as well, so that's basically kind of what it felt like. Does that make sense?

FR: Yeah, aw, that sounds sad.

LH: It's okay.

FR: Have you found things to, like, help you, like, get out of that?

LH: Yeah, definitely, I think Cal Poly especially has opened up my, like, opportunity window so much and I think being involved in orientation, I've met so many people and so many people that I still hold dear to myself and, you know, I've found people that are going to be in my life for a very long time. And it's so helpful having them and having my best friends here because even if they're not here, like, one of my best friends, Dylan, lives in L.A. now and I still talk to him and call him on the phone and need him, like, every day. Um, but I just find comfort in the fact that I've actually found people who care about me and who I actually believe are going to stay in my life because I think that's really hard for me personally, is I have a very big sense of fear that everyone's going to leave and I think when I dwindle that down and I find people that I'm like, you know what, they might stay, I think that's kind of where it's come to help out from Cal Poly, it's because I've found those people.

FR: How long did it take you to find those people?

LH: Well, honestly, I lived in Cerro Vista and so I lived in the apartments and momentarily, I completely clicked with my direct roommate and we were like the same person; I had so much fun with her, um. But, that only lasted for a little while and things, we didn't end up staying as close, but there were four boys who lived above me and I was in their apartment every single day. And I just fell in love with them and I just loved being with them and, um, one of my other roommates—her name is Ashley—I've lived with her as well. So my sophomore year, I moved in with the boys above me. So I basically just like added myself to that room. Um, and they really took care of me. I loved being with them, I loved being surrounded by them and they have honestly done so much for me, I can never thank them enough. And I don't think they realize how much of an impact that they've had on my life and my mental health, but they've protected me and saved me more times than I can count. And my roommate Ashley and Avery and Cammie now, um, I love dearly and I was even friends with them freshman year, and so I think it was just, like, I got really blessed in terms of where I found housing and the people that came into my life, so. I got really lucky.

FR: Aw. That's so nice. Um, like, so kind of going into the social media part more, um, have you found that same kind of connection with people over social media as you have in person, whether it's like people that you've met online, or people that you're just keeping up with that you've met in person?

LH: I don't think so, honestly. I mean, definitely not as strong of a connection. Um, I think it, social media really helps me in terms of keeping up with people and, you know, seeing where their life is at right now and what they're doing and allowing me to touch base with them in a very easy and general manner, but, um you know, strangers that I've connected with online or people that I haven't known prior, uh, I don't think I've really delved into those relationships as much and I haven't found people because I've been online. And so I think it helps in me meeting new people and maybe starting those relationships, but, um, I haven't really found a relationship that I feel the same way about on social media.

FR: Yeah, totally. Um, would you say you spend more time online, like, taking in info, or like, putting stuff out?

LH: Oh, definitely taking in. Yeah, um, I'm not the biggest fan of having my photo taken, so I think that I don't post as much as a lot people do, but I love seeing, you know, peoples' photos on Instagram, or what people tweet on Twitter, or not the biggest Facebook fan, but I still look at it and, um, I don't think I put myself out there half as much as I look at other peoples' things.

FR: When you do post, what kind of stuff, like, do you put?

LH: Um, I usually put events that I'm doing or moments that I kind of want to capture. So, oftentimes, it is with those best friends that I mentioned, um, or it's something that is very personal sometimes but that takes a lot more effort for me to put out there, um, and it's kind of risky being vulnerable in a sense, but it's usually moments where I feel like I'm very happy or things that I, you know, would like other people to see, or feel, I guess, or share in that moment of bliss or that moment of happiness that I have.

FR: And like, how do you think, like, those posts that you send out especially because they're like really meaningful to you, how do you think they, like, affect how you feel about yourself and your connections with other people?

LH: I think that they—it's kind of like a double-edged sword because I, you know, I'm usually posting things that I'm happy about or moments that are really great, um, and so I love that because I want to be a positive person and I want, you know, people to be happy with things what they see or things like that, but it's hard on the other hand because you never really know what's going on behind closed doors and so it's really hard, especially because people have a lot of, you know, discomfort or issues with seeing, like, other peoples' ideal lives on Instagram or in videos and things like that, um. So it's kind of a balance, but I think it makes me feel good and I have this drive that kind of frustrates me as well because I don't want to be on my phone and I don't want to spend time on it, but I still have this inkling of, you know, like, I want to post this, or I want to take a photo right now and share it with other people and so it's kind of frustrating, but also I still really like to do it, so.

FR: Totally, totally. And do you think there's a way to utilize social media so that you can have those strong connections with people?

LH: I definitely think so. I think it, you know, has to do with what you're seeking out of your social media use, um. You know, just for like Tinder or something, you can like, you can definitely build—I know people that, like, have built relationships off of Tinder, and I think that social media is a really great way for people to stay in each other's lives or to meet people and just start a conversation with them based on what they post, or what they like, or what they're interested in and I've had moments like those, I just haven't really had the opportunity or really the experience of delving into a relationship only via social media. Um, but I definitely think it's possible and I think social media is a very positive aspect in that sense because it can happen.

FR: Totally. Um, how often do you, like, directly, like, contact someone over social media? Like, through messaging, or like, a comment meant for a specific person.

LH: Is this, like, even people I know without social media? Like, or just people I've met over the internet?

FR: Oh, yeah, like people you know in person—

LH: Oh. Daily. Every day. Yeah, I am constantly sending a couple of my close friends, like memes, or things that resonate with us, or things that I think would make them smile, or my friend Dylan and I constantly send each other poetry, or things with art in it and, um, I don't know. It's kind of nice because it's a friendly reminder that someone is thinking of you, or you know, that brought their attention to you, or, you know, you want to share this with someone that means something to you, so, like, do it every day, definitely.

FR: Yeah, totally. And Dylan is the one that lives in L.A., right?

LH: Yeah, he is.

FR: Like, it's so incredible how you can, like, bridge that gap, like immediately, you know?

LH: It's almost instantaneous, so it's really nice. It's really easy and I think a lot of people take that for granted as well.

FR: Yeah, totally. Like social media is such a part of our daily lives that, like, we know we can contact these people all the time.

LH: Yup, it's so easy. And it's so crazy to think of in comparison to when we didn't have or to when we didn't have phones or something. Trying to get ahold of someone or just, we're constantly absorbed by that I think that constant contact. And so it's really crazy how easy it is.

FR: Have you ever, like, used social media to the point where it made you feel, like, more alone or does it generally make you feel more connected to your, like, people that you know.

LH: I think it definitely has made me feel alone before. I think especially in high school, with like Snapchat stories or videos and things like that, I would constantly see, you know, my group of friends hanging out when I didn't get invited or things like that. Or people doing these fun exciting things and documenting it and I'm just sitting at home or doing something alone and I think it definitely has the possibility of making me feel alone and making me feel like, well, why am I not doing something, um, and kind of questioning yourself, but. Uh, I think it's gotten better since I've been in college. I don't really know, but maybe it's just because I hang out with different people, um, but I think it definitely has a way of making me feel more alone, especially because if I'm looking at social media, odds are I'm already physically alone and, you know, I'm not surrounded by people or doing something for, uh, most of the points or most of the time anyways.

FR: Yeah, definitely. There's like that comparison aspect to it, you know, where it's hard to see somebody else have fun and not think, like, why am I not having that much fun.

LH: Exactly, exactly, yeah. I think there was a video on, like, on Jay Alvarez and Alexis or whatever—they document their lives doing, like, a bunch of fun, exciting things and, like, there's a video blogger talking about, like, they're not realistic goals. And I, like, I remember that hitting me so hard because I was constantly looking at their videos and just being like why, like why can I not have that, like why don't I have the resources to travel and do all these fun things that they're doing. They look so happy all the time, like, their lives are perfect and, in reality, they might be paid or sponsored to do this and you don't really know what's going on in their minds and a lot of it's very much staged and so it's really hard taking a step back and being like, well, you know, like that's not exactly real life, in a way.

FR: Totally. Reset this. Like, because it's on social media and you, like, have that choice to, like, post it or not, like, who's going to post the bad stuff, you know? It's like so constructed.

LH: Yes, definitely.

FR: Um, how important are, like, your own, your own profile to you? Does that make sense?

LH: Yeah. Um, I think it's important to me in a sense because, you know, I professionally, from a standpoint I think, you know, if I apply to law school or if I apply to a job, they're going to look at my profiles and so I don't want to have anything that's, you know, too, I don't know, that could get me in trouble in a sense, or make them judge me automatically, um, for a bad note for something that I did. And I think that I'm, I'm a very open person when it comes to a lot of surface-level things and I'm very easy to get to know people, but with very personal issues, I have a lot of walls and so sometimes if I choose to share that via social media, it's, it's really important to me, because that's something that, like, means a whole lot and has taken a lot of courage to kind of put out in the open. And I think it's insane the amount of support and faith and courage and everything that you can gain from social media by doing that, but I think there's also times where I'm like, oh, I'm just going to post this, like it's not, not everything has the same amount of thought that goes into it. But, with certain things, especially if it's not some happy moment or some captured moment of me at some event or doing something fun, um, if it's something more personal then odds are, it's going to be a lot more important than any of the other things.

FR: Yeah, like, what more personal stuff would you think of putting on social media?

LH: Um, I don't put all that much, but I did put, um, something about sexual assault on social media because I did this event with—within orientation where you wrote something on your hands and it was kind of anonymous, but, uh, I chose to share it on Instagram because I started doing my senior project about rape and sexual assault and I think it was just a message that I was ready to get out there and that was something that I put forth that a lot of people didn't know about me. And it was just insane the amount of feedback I got and I, you know, if I can spread a message or increase awareness, or, you know, make people realize that, you know, it's not always so happy and perfect and everything that it might seem on social media then I think I made a good choice if I shared it.

FR: Totally, and like, how much would you say, like, your social media accounts and profiles and all that are a real reflection of who you are?

LH: Um, I think in terms of what I like to do and, you know, who I'm spending time with, they're a very good reflection because I'm constantly seen, you know, with my niece, or with my friends, or in SLO and things like that and things that I enjoy and I think they're a very good representation of me in that way, but in terms of, you know, what might be going on in my life or my mental health or personal struggles that I'm dealing with, it's not very representative of it at all. It's very, very hidden. Yeah.

FR: I totally believe that, it's like how people use social media.

LH: Yeah.

FR: Um, so like, I have kind of a funny question.

LH: Okay.

FR: Not like, funny, but—like, at night, when you look into the sky, what do you think about?

LH: Oh my gosh. Um. I, I kind of think about, you know, how small I am. And I think about, you know, the pain and a lot of experiences that I've had in life, because one of my old best friends always used to tell me to look up at the stars and I never really did until I met him. And ever since I started doing it, it just makes me realize that, you know, there's so much out there that I don't know and there's just so much out there that, you know, I'm not affected by and I'm not going to be able to affect nearly as many people lives that I really want to and it makes me think about things like faith and, you know, I practice faith and I practice religion and it makes me think of where I'm going to go after this life and I, I usually think about my relationships with people and, you know, the people that might have left my life or the people that I might have left and, you know, what I want to be remembered by and what legacy I'm leaving on this earth and, you know, maybe I'll be one of those stars one day and someone will look up to the stars and remember me.

FR: Heavy stuff. Um, that's pretty much all I wanted to ask. Is there anything else you want to say, you think people should know this about loneliness, social media.

LH: Um, I think, I mean it's kind of cliché, but you can never judge someone based on their social media. Um, someone might look like they have the most perfect, endearing life, but you never really know what's going on, so if you feel a connection with someone, or, you know, you like one of their pictures and everything, maybe try and have an actual conversation with them, and talk to them, and see what they feel, or what they think, or what they lie to do, and make it a deeper meaning. You know, put some more energy and effort into it than just liking a photo because I think a lot of good can come from social media and it's a great expression of things and so people should probably not take that for granted as much.

FR: Oh my god, that's awesome advice. Thank you so much!

LH: Of course, thank you. I hoped I helped in any way.

Appendix E

Interview Transcripts: Nicholas Lapidus

The following interview was conducted to gather insight from a student attending California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo based on a set of topics that reflect the study's initial research questions.

Interviewer: Francesca Ricapito

Respondent: Nicholas Lapidus

Date of Interview: 5/24/17

Interview Transcription:

Francesca Ricapito: Could I get you to start by saying your first and last name and spelling it for me, please?

Nicholas Lapidus: Okay, uh, we good to go?

FR: Yeah. And you can look at me too; you don't have to look at like, the camera the whole time.

NL: Okay, my name is Nicholas Lapidus. N-I-C-H-O-L-A-S, Lapidus L-A-P-I-D-U-S. Um.

FR: Cool, and um, you just tell me a little bit about yourself. Like, anything that comes to mind.

NL: Okay, I'm a second-year Biomedical Engineering student here at Cal Poly. Uh, I speak English and Russian, main hobbies are video games, uh, some model building, and drawing. And I'm typically a creative person, but I try really hard to put some analytics into everything and um, observe the world and put creativity back into it, which is kind of why I like engineering because you take math, you take physics, you take hard sciences and you make something out of it.

FR: That's a really cool way of thinking about it. What kind of stuff do you like to draw?

NL: Um, spaceships is a big one. Like, space scenarios, um, some Grand Armada stuff, and some figure drawing. I have a couple, like, characters, like OC's that I've really focused on and a lot of it revolves around video games, um, just because it's a good base line, to have an established universe that I can get references off of. And spend a lot of time with that and that's mainly just to practice because I'm not that great at drawing. I just do it for fun when I have time, which isn't a lot of—which I don't have a lot of. But, you know, something on the side.

FR: Yeah, totally. Everyone's got to have like, the little things that they actually like to do, you know? Um, what does a day in the life of Nich look like?

NL: Um, well during the week days, it's obviously mostly classes. Um, in between, it's usually, uh just like on Youtube, watching videos. Uh, sketching, messaging people on the side, and on

weekends and at night, it's typically video games because I'm a PC player, so I need to be at home in order to do any of that. Um, and yeah, that's it for the most part.

FR: How do you like Cal Poly?

NL: Um, it's okay. I like so far the programs are nice and I'm having a good time academically. Um, it's hard, but that's just the name of the game, so.

FR: Yeah, totally. Especially in engineering. Um, so like, when would you say you're most lonely?

NS: Um, very, very late at night. Like, because typically how it goes is I'll be distracting myself with video games for hours and most video games I play are online, so I have like a clan of people that I pop in to chat with, talk, or like we're going some op or something like that. Um, but it's typically after that, like the couple hours I have when I'm doing whatever chores I have left over and just like, walking my dog at midnight is when I get really existential and nihilistic lonely, so yeah.

FR: It's so much easier to feel existential and like, yourself in the world when there's like, no one else walking on the street—

NL: Yeah, it's absolutely empty, no cars, no like—some lights and it's—I enjoy it, but it's also still lonely.

FR: Yeah, totally. There's like, that weird feeling, where it kind of feels natural and cool, but at the same time, you're like all by yourself and you have to, like, get yourself in that mindset where you, like, what do I do with just me?

NL: Yeah.

FR: Do you stay up late a lot?

NL: Yeah, bad habit, but I've had a very, very hard time sleeping a lot of the time. Developed in middle school, where it was just like, it's easy for me to stay up until 3 a.m. Like, I don't even realize it, and then I'll be like, well, I have to wake up at seven. And yeah, it happens a lot and I take supplements when I can, but even the supplements, like, still it's like 1 a.m. is the typical nighttime for me.

FR: Yeah, that's like a hard habit to break.

NL: I'm very nocturnal. I'm very inactive during the day. Very active at night, for the most part.

FR: Everyone, everyone's got their own cycles, you know, so. Um, how often do you think like, other people feel lonely?

NL: Um, I mean, other people is so broad, I don't really know—I would say also like, other people might feel lonely whenever they're just at home studying maybe might be the time most people get lonely, I know I do. Um, like in between times, like when you're, when you're like have like, a couple hours to spare, but like, you can't really get, get, get out with people because you like just don't have enough time enough time to get out with people, but just enough time to like, start feeling it.

FR: Yeah, totally. Um, like, describe loneliness. Like, what is it for you?

NL: Okay. For me, it's not just the situation of being alone, because there's lots of times where I can be alone and I'll be fine. It's um—loneliness is, for me, it's always that urge to uh, either have experience or just communicate with somebody else, some other sentient being of some sort. Uh, like, I don't know, yeah. Like, loneliness is that urge to not just be with other people, it's also the urge to experience things with other people.

FR: Totally, to get like, that one step further and—

NL: Yeah, because like, walking through a crowd, you can still feel lonely, but it's completely different if you're walking down the street with a friend.

FR: Yeah, totally. Can you describe, like—I know it's, like, hard to put into words, I guess, but how does it, like, feel?

NL: It feels, um, typically it's like feeling heavy-hearted, some sort of tugging, like it's like, especially in situations where I know I could've been with other people, or like if I made plans earlier, I could've hung out, it's that feeling of like, a little bit of regret, like, I could be with friends right now, I made a mistake to not, like, call them up, or whatever. Um, that's sometimes. Other times it's just like, it's just kind of sadness, like um, sadness and a little bit of anxiety, where it's like, am I, am I becoming a better or worse person for being alone at this time.

FR: Totally. And like, something that I've been wondering about is, like, where do you cross the line between being alone and being lonely?

NL: Um, that's a good one. I would say it's when the distractions stop being effective. Because I can be alone listening to music, but after an hour or two, where I can't find anything else I want to listen to, or I'm playing video games and I'm at the point where it's like I'm, I, I'm just kind of bored of them right now. Or it's like I'm drawing and I don't—I can't find inspiration anymore. That's typically when it hits me, it's like I shouldn't—I don't want to be just by myself right not. I want to experience something else.

FR: Yeah, totally, that's like, such a good way of putting it. Um, have you like, found anything that like, alleviates your loneliness?

NL: Um, online, like, gaming definitely, was the biggest one for me. Um, and especially getting into certain games, like ["starssis?"] or EVE Online, like big MMO's are multiplayer experiences where you're almost forced to be—to put yourself in social situations. Um, like, for

example, we hop into EVE Online and I'm a part of this giant alliance with like, hundreds of people, but you can just go into one of the random channels with ten other people in it and just have a nice conversation, get a group going, and start doing something together, instead of just sitting there, just playing a video game all by yourself.

FR: Totally, and do you get to, like, chat and like, talk to each other?

NL: Oh, absolutely that's, that's the whole point, it's like, it's—we—the video game is there, but the video game is just content. It's, it's just sitting there not doing anything. When we get a group together, we unlock more things to do together as well. So it's like, oh we went on, like, ten minutes in this epic battle that just like kept going on and, like, even if we lost, even if we did horribly, even if we got our asses handed to us, it was still a hell of a lot of fun. It's still something we laugh about and post the, post recordings of and like make, make jokes about. It's that kind of thing. Because it doesn't matter the experience itself. What matters is that you were there with other people.

FR: Totally. Do you like, do you like ever make connections with these people and then, like, can you like, save them and go back and like, hang out with them again another time?

NL: Oh, oh, absolutely, um, when I was like around five—between five and seven years ago, there was a video game that I played, me and my dad, we joined a clan of just like, maybe thirty other people, and we became like—they were my best friends for a while. Some of those people in there we still talk to today, go hang out—I go to Los Angeles sometimes to go hang out with people that I played with then because um, it's kind of a weird thing, but video games—like, online friends get stereotyped not as real friends by a lot of people and that's so not true. Online friends have been greater friends to me than real-life friends sometimes. It's just like, it's the kind of people that you find.

FR: Yeah totally, like you can still make connections with people through the internet.

NL: Yeah, and sometimes those connections can be deeper, like, sometimes like oh, a friend I had from high school, the only reason we were friends is because we had the same classes together. But like, I'm friends with someone on the internet because we went through a war together in this video game and like, we have stories to share and recordings saved and like, inside jokes we made during the whole endeavor.

FR: That's so awesome. Like, totally I feel like the internet gets a bad rap for like, against like going on the internet to talk to people versus like, talking to people face-to-face, when really, like the internet is like a tool and it depends on how you use it. And like, you can totally make like those cool connections like that.

NL: Yeah, and you don't even need video games. Like, hop into chat with people, like I have a couple friends from Europe, like a couple across the world, like go in and chat with them sometimes. It's much, much easier to get social experiences with social media because we don't have to physically move anywhere or do anything to be able to get that.

FR: Yeah, totally. Like, how—do you find it harder to like, make friends, like, around campus, like face-to-face, than like, going online?

NL: Oh yeah, one hundred percent. I have only a few friends here on campus because I don't have—I don't feel like, that need that much to like, go out and try to connect with people because I just do it all online for the most part when I need it.

FR: Cool. Um, just going to reset this. Um, um, so like, do you use like, other than video games, do you use any social media sites to like, stay in contact with people?

NL: Um, a couple. Mainly Facebook is the biggest one. Uh, Instagram kind of lightly, but it's just like we share some posts with some people and I know some people from there. Past that, not, not really that much else. Maybe Skype technically, but Skype is more like an intermediate tool than anything.

FR: Yeah.

NL: So I don't really, yeah you don't—I don't meet people on Skype. I meet people on Facebook and Instagram mostly.

FR: Awesome. Like, what—how often are you on like, Facebook and Instagram and stuff like that?

NL: Um, very often—I don't know it's hard to quantify because it's the kind of thing that now we're at the point where we almost have a stream of, stream of connection. It's not you're on Facebook for a couple hours, it's you have a phone that's connected to Facebook all the time and when things happen, you're immediately, um, notified of it. Like, especially if you carry a phone around that has a buzzer and has notifications turned on, I don't think you're ever really off Facebook technically then. Um, yeah, stuff like that.

FR: That's so true. Like, people sleep with their phones like, literally on their beds next to them—

NL: Yeah.

FR: —so you can get them all the time.

NL: Yeah.

FR: Um, what do you like, typically use these sights to do? Like, do you just kind of—

NL: Um.

FR: —take in other peoples' stuff or like, post a lot? Message people?

NL: It's usually jokes, memes, shitposts, for the most part. Uh, like we have a group of people around Cal Poly that's just all we do is share dumb jokes, dumb inside memes, and stuff like that. Because, that's just, that's just for the fun of it and that's also how I met a couple of people here, so yeah.

FR: Do you guys, like, hang out?

NL: Uh, yeah hung out with a couple of them so far.

FR: Oh my god, awesome. Um, like, how important are your personal profiles to you?

NL: Um, they've kind of declined in importance, uh because I can use them for such wide, like broad, it's just more like a gateway for things. I don't post much personal things on my social media anymore because it's all just like—I just am in parts of groups where I post and the profile itself is kind of there, just a name.

FR: Yeah, totally. Like, do you think—would you say you like, know these people in the groups that you post to better than like, I don't know, all of your friends at once and so you're more likely to them rather than to, like, your page?

NL: Um, it's mainly just because, when I'm in a specific group, only specific people can see what I post in that group, so it's almost a privacy thing. Because if I post something to my profile, I have to take into consideration, oh my parents are going to see it, oh possible employers are going to see, oh like if it's public, then it's like, what message am I sending out about myself while it's like if I'm in a dumb meme group and I post a dumb meme, no one cares. It's a dumb meme. If they like it, they'll like it. Um, and if they don't, I don't care because it's not like, a part of me at that point. It's a part of the persona that's in that group.

FR: Totally. It's like way no pressure.

NL: Yeah, exactly. Like, say it's like Reddit: it's literally just a name, there's nothing else to you there besides your name and your comment history, it's like okay, yeah.

FR: Yeah.

NL: And people use that to judge you, but it's so shallow and misguided and typically so far off the mark that it doesn't matter at all. Yeah.

FR: Totally. Um, how often do you, like, directly communicate with other people, like, on your social media sites, like, comment on their thing—

NL: Oh, okay.

FR: — or message them directly? Something that's like, pointed at a specific person.

NL: Like, how much, or how often?

FR: How often.

NL: How often? Uh, regularly, like that's—I would say that's about either between twenty-five and fifty percent of the experiences, whereas like, I'll see someone's post and I'll reply to it, like, I just reply to stuff. Like, start conversation or discussion, or reply with, like another like, post of some kind.

FR: Totally. Does it make you, like, feel closer with that person, or?

NL: Oh, oh yeah, absolutely. Especially like the people that you go, like, go back with a little bit. Especially like in, in specific groups and like focused groups, you—if they're not too large, you can, you kind of get, like, your own idea and visualization of every single person in that group, especially if they post often, they almost—you can, you get like a virtual idea of what they are. If anything, you get a virtual idea of what their like, postings are about.

FR: Totally.

NL: If that makes sense.

FR: Like, kind of. Like, you build up your own, like, impression of them, based—

NL: Yeah.

FR: —on what they're posting.

NL: And then if you do ever directly communicate, then it's like, you have common ground at least. You have at least some common ground. If not, you, you can actually like, start to get to actually know the person at that point. And you can start with like, the posts you guys share.

FR: Like, do you think you use social media more for meeting people or like, keeping up connections with people that you've met in person?

NL: Oh, probably meeting people. Um, and I don't know, it kind of depends, like Instagram was mostly for like for people I've met in person, I would say. Um, and then Facebook is because I'm in a group; I occasionally just friend people from the group, so that is kind of how that works. So it kind of depends on the site and the kind of content going to get out of it.

FR: Yeah, totally. And you know you have stuff in common, I guess, if you're in the same group with someone.

NL: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

FR: Cool. Um, do you ever, like, see like—just talking about how peoples' posts kind of like, make—like you get an impression of them from that? Like, how do you feel like, this

constructed image, of like, their comments and their posts and stuff compare to how they feel like in their day-to-day life.

NL: Um. Well, with the kind of content that I'm around a lot of the time, it's very not serious. Like, the impression I get from people, the impression that I would get from people is like, them in their sarcastic or in their joke tone, for the most part. So like, I don't—it would be that part of their personality I'd get to know, is like, what kind of humor do they enjoy, like, where is their wit and creativity at when it comes to humor. And like, humor and I don't know. Just lighthearted stuff for the most part, nothing serious.

FR: How much of their personality do you think that encompasses?

NL: Um, a decent chunk, but I can't say I could, like, define a person from it. I could maybe say like, they're this kind of internet person, but not like, oh here's their whole personality and Meyer Briggs type thing and everything like that.

FR: Yeah I totally know what you mean. Um, how much of your, like, self do you think you share online?

NL: Um, similarly, I keep, I keep it lighthearted. I don't keep it serious. Like, I'll get into arguments and stuff like that, but that's typically just um, either when someone's so directly wrong that it's just like, nah, you gotta know where you're wrong, or at the point where it's, it's just stuff like that and the rest of it is like, just for entertainment. Like, I post in video game groups about my video game character and like, what we're like, what I do and stuff like that. Nothing, nothing really big; maybe a little bit like also where my creativity is at and like, and where I—where my wit is at, but nothing—I keep repeating myself. Um, nothing too serious about my personality, I would say, could be taken from my internet personas.

FR: Okay, totally. What do you think is like the most beneficial part of the way you, like, use social media for you?

NL: Um.

FR: Does that make sense?

NL: Most beneficial, like what I get out of it? Yeah.

NL: Okay. Um, mainly just some of it is just keeping up connections with people that I like, know in real life. Some of it. The biggest part of it has been just like being able to get, like, some sort of social situations and like, talking to people, even though I don't talk to a lot of people in real life. It's a big part of it.

FR: Awesome. Um. I—I have a funny question. It's not, like, funny—

NL: Okay.

FR: —it's like, odd.

NL: Go for it.

FR: Um, at night, when you look into the sky, what do you think about?

NL: Oh. Oh, this one. This one I do look up into the sky a lot, and it's mainly, uh, it, it—looking up to the sky lets my creativity just go wild with it. This is why I say I draw spaceships. It comes from that because I'm thinking like, wouldn't it be nice if we were out there more, if we were attempting to, like, colonize something, or we discovered FTL travel, or we're bending space and time in order to do something. Just like, looking up to the sky just reminds me of the lack of restrictions that we truly have. And it reminds me of the infinite willpower humanity has and the infinite possibilities that our imagination can create. Um, and also I like space, just as a concept. It's there, it's infinite, it's black, like, cool. Is—it's somewhere for us to be.

FR: So trippy, you know? Yeah, I just imagine, like, looking up and like, zooming into there and like, exploring space, you know? It totally—it just seems so infinite, you know? You can do anything.

NL: Yeah.

FR: Um, like, when you feel lonely, do you feel like, like kind of alienated or like, does it motivate you to like, reach out to someone online? Or like, do you just let it kind of like sit there until it goes away? Like, what does it do for you?

NL: To a point, I would say I let it kind of stew. Um, loneliness, like when I'm feeling lonely during those long periods of it, it's—I usually self-reflect a lot about like, what I've been doing, like how I've been doing in life as like, should I be doing something better. And typically if I feel myself starting to slip into, like, almost like a depressive spiral, I'll be like I—this is not good. I should probably go talk to somebody. I'll probably just strike up a conversation with, uh, like someone I—typically like at that point I'm online with someone I know in real life and like who's a decently close friend that I can actually talk to about things. And sometimes, like, from that, I'll make plans; I'll be like okay, I should probably go see a movie with somebody, you know.

FR: Yeah, totally. Like I feel like loneliness is this natural emotion you know? And so it's like as valid as any other. But like, when it starts to like, hurt you and you like feel too alone, then like, it's like, not good anymore.

NL: Yeah, absolutely.

FR: Um, so when like—sometimes when people feel lonely, they do like, begin to spiral into that kind of, like, depressive state. Do you, like—what would you say to other people when they start to feel lonely?

NL: I—say to other people...Um, I'd say like even though you may feel like there's no one maybe looking out, like, looking out for you directly, or you may feel like that you're not where you want to be socially, or you may be feeling like you don't connect with other people, there's seven billion of us. Over seven billion of us. And if you can't find someone directly to talk to, like in real life, like I use the internet exactly for that typically. Like, I don't even post that much, but I'll just read stories from other people and like, posts on Reddit, like, front page, like something uplifting or um, or good news, stuff like that. Um, you could go look at that. If you feel like it's something that you want to be—like if you're lonely because you feel like something in your life is making you lonely, well, you don't have to always, like, go at it directly. But if you go out look for what other people are doing, even if you don't directly communicate with them, that can maybe help you find where—what you want to be doing. Kind of a long-winded rambling, but you know. As it goes.

FR: Oh my god, that's awesome. Um, that's pretty much everything that I wanted to ask. Is there any last thing that, like, you think people should know, that you want to get off your chest, that you just want to say?

NL: I don't know. One sec.

FR: Take your, take your time with it, you know?

NL: Okay. Okay. Maybe um, loneliness, if put to good use I find, can be a good, like self-reflection tool like I mentioned earlier because when you're alone, you just have the perspective of your own. You don't have the views of anybody else and you don't have, um, kind of extrusive thoughts of like, you don't—when you're lonely, you're not directly worrying, like, what are other people thinking of me at that moment. You're inside yourself thinking should I be pull, uh—pushing myself outwards. And you can use that to maybe find new things that you want to be doing, maybe a new hobby, or um, like if you want to be a part of a like a group you want to find, something like that. Um, because when you're lonely, you can think about, like, what do you actually enjoy doing, not what you, what you make yourself enjoy doing for other people. As like, you can be like, I'm lonely and I'm a part of this group and they aren't really helping me out, so maybe you can like think about like, well, where can I go that will help me out, and stuff like that.

FR: Yeah.

NL: Yeah.

FR: I like the, like, independence of that.

NL: Yeah, being lonely is an independent concept. Being lonely is your own mind, your own soul. And it's both a sadness and like a tugging for more, but it's also a tugging for more. You can use that to spout the idea of growth from it.

FR: That's awesome. Exploring space, you know?

NL: Yeah, exactly. Like, the—

FR: Oh my god.

NL: —the big bang started with a single particle, as with what the current theory is. Like, the entire universe, billions and billions of years, started from a single particle. Every concept we know and understand, the space of infinity, the constant expansion, is all something that came out of almost nothing. Not to get fake deep or anything.

FR: That's, that's the trippy thing, you know? Like, all of this was made from like, one particle.

NL: Yup. As we think. But, then again, that's us thinking.

FR: Oh my god, we're going to like, reinvent the big bang theory right here.

NL: Yeah.

FR: Oh my god, well thank you so much. That's like all I had to ask.

NL: Well, thank you for having me.

Appendix F

Interview Transcripts: Natalya Suttmiller

The following interview was conducted to gather insight from a student attending California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo based on a set of topics that reflect the study's initial research questions.

Interviewer: Francesca Ricapito
Respondent: Natalya Suttmiller
Date of Interview: 5/18/17

Interview Transcription:

Francesca Ricapito: Could you, like, start by, like, saying your name and spelling it for me, please?

Natalya Suttmiller: Yeah, yeah. Um, my full name, or just first name, or—

FR: Uh, your full name.

NS: Full name, okay.

FR: However you, like, want to be, like—

NS: Um, okay, I am Natalya Suttmiller and how you spell that is N-A-T-A-L-Y-A-S-U-T-T-M-I-L-L-E-R.

FR: Great job.

NS: Thanks.

FR: Um, so, like, how's your day been?

NS: Um, my day's pretty good. It was a very productive day. Yeah.

FR: Cool. Okay, tell me, tell me about yourself. It could be anything about yourself—

NS: Anything?

FR: It could be anything that comes to mind.

NS: Okay, I am a sophomore Anthropology major and, wow, it's really hard when you're put on the spot, to talk about yourself, um. I am—I work at Linnea's and I really like coffee. Um, I have certain hobbies: I really like going to the beach a lot and I like being in nature and going backpacking. Um, I also really, really like music, a lot, it's really important to me. I was in

KCPR last quarter, am not right now, and then will be again next quarter, and I kind of miss doing my show, it was fun to do that because music is a really big part of my life, so.

FR: Like, what, what show are you going to have?

NS: I don't know. I've been really interested in doing the brunch show, like Alyssa, um. But maybe just a regular format.

FR: Alyssa always had, like, the best show.

NS: I always really enjoyed listening to it and she always wanted me to, like do her show because I, like, worked at Linnea's after her and then bought her Vespa. She was like, you're going to do the French show one day, and I was like, okay. I used to take French in high school, so, and I'm actually going to Paris in a month, so that's really fun. And I've never been out of the country before, so I'm super excited, yeah.

FR: Why are you going?

NS: Um, one of my coworkers, Patrick, his roommate, um, has a really successful startup and, um, he's giving a, like a talk at a conference there in June, and so he just, like, asked a bunch of his friends if they wanted to go. Because his company's paying for it. I mean, I had to pay for my ticket, but, um, I'm so excited. Never been out of the country. I even had to get my passport to go. Yeah.

FR: That is so cool.

NS: Yeah, I am so excited.

FR: How long are you going to be there?

NS: Just a week or ten days, maybe just a little bit longer, if we decide to stay longer. We might go to Iceland. Yeah, so, I'm like so ready for that. I just have to get through the next, like, ten weeks, I mean, five weeks, it is not week one, thank god.

FR: Oh my god, thank god. Um, what do you think of, like Cal Poly?

NS: I have mixed feelings about Cal Poly sometimes, um. I've learned to really like it. I also grew up thirty minutes away from Cal Poly, so I knew a lot about Cal Poly and a lot about SLO before I came, which was helpful and kind of boring—not boring, it was like nothing was new to me, like you know, when you move away to a college and, like, everything's new and you have to learn about a new town and meet new people, um. I met a lot of new people, but also like, I just already had my friends here too, so. It's weird going to college in the, like, place you grew up. Totally, do you see like family a lot?

NS: Um, sometimes. I know it's like thirty minutes away, so it doesn't seem far away, but it is kind of far away to people because, like, you have to drive over the grade and, like, through the

countryside to get here. People have a hard time doing that. Um, I see my mom more than my dad, but.

FR: What, like, city are you from?

NS: Paso Robles. So, thirty minutes north. Weird little town. Just a bit smaller than here. And, uh, more desert-like.

FR: I feel like I only hear of people going to Paso for—

NS: For wine?

FR: For wine!

NS: I mean, yeah. There's not a lot to do there. You would, you know, once you get your license when you're sixteen, you go to SLO and hang out there. Or like, you go and hang out at the beach. Before then, you just like do something, I don't know. Growing up there was—I don't hate the town, but, like, it is pretty boring, like, there's nothing there. Um, except, like, winos. And like, fancy restaurants, really fancy restaurants.

FR: Like all the, like, tourist stuff.

NS: Yeah, yeah. For, like, kind of bougie people.

FR: Because those are the kind of people that are going to go wine tasting for a weekend.

NS: Yeah, yeah, and it's really funny, yeah. The wine's good, yeah, I was surrounded by wineries at my house growing up, so that was kind of fun. Like all the vineyards around me. It was really pretty.

FR: That sounds pretty.

NS: But, um, other than that, in Paso, like, I don't know what we did, hung out with each other, I guess, played video games. So, yeah.

FR: Cool. What, what does, like, a day in the life of Natalya look like?

NS: Well, I guess that depends on the day, but generally, um, I wake up and I make myself something to eat because I love food and I look forward to every meal. It's true. And, um, if I have class, then I make myself look semi presentable, I guess, for class. And then I usually bike to class, um, go do that class stuff, and then I'll, like study in between that, and then I'll, I'll come home and, like, hang out with my roommate, and, like cook us dinner, or something. And, then just like maybe go to another friend's house, maybe stay home, it just depends on how I'm feeling.

FR: Totally, um, so like, describe, like, what is loneliness?

NS: Hm, I think loneliness is kind of hard to define, it's kind of just a feeling. It—because you can feel lonely by yourself or you can feel lonely around a bunch of different people, in person, all the time. I mean, like, I think it's more common for me to feel lonely when I'm by myself, but I definitely feel the emotion around everyone else sometimes.

FR: What are, like, like the differences in those feelings? Like, how does it feel when you feel lonely when you're by yourself, versus when you feel lonely around other people?

NS: Um, well I guess it feels like when I'm lonely by myself, there's kind of a cause for it and it's because I'm by myself, not doing much. Um, and it doesn't really—being lonely doesn't really bother me, um, when I'm by myself actually. I would say that like if I'm lonely around other people or feeling lonely, it's a little bit, not scarier, but—scary is definitely the wrong word, but like, more saddening when you feel like you can't connect to the people around you, which like, for me makes me feel lonely.

FR: Totally.

NS: In those moments.

FR: What, like, do you think is a major cause of, like, not being able to connect with those people?

NS: Probably just not having confidence in myself. I think confidence, at least for me fluctuates, you know, for whatever reason, and when I'm feeling really, like, good about myself around other people, I feel like I can connect to them, but like if I'm feeling really bad about myself and I'm around people, then I just like won't connect to them and feel lonely.

FR: Totally. And, like, do you think the type of people you're around affects that?

NS: Mhm, sometimes. If I, like, if I'm with my close friends, of course, I'm not going to feel lonely around them. But, like, if I get nervous around new people, or just like, I guess socially anxious, even, around just larger groups of people, then—and I don't know them—then I feel that way more, for sure.

FR: Totally. Like, at those parties where you don't know—

NS: Yeah.

FR: —anyone and you're just like, well this should be, like, super fun, but—

NS: And you, like, want to get yourself to talk to all of them, and you're, like, okay, maybe I'll just drink a little but more, and then I'll talk to people randomly. But, like, I find that if I go to party alone and you, like don't have a wingman there, or whatever, not wingman, but like, just a friend there to, like, talk to, then it's so much harder to, like, connect to other people.

FR: Yeah, and that's so funny, like having someone you know there kind of like—

NS: Like loosens you up a little bit to, like, connect to other people.

FR: Yeah, because you know you can already, like act yourself around them and it, like, validates you to like act yourself.

NS: Around other people, yeah.

FR: How funny. Um, so like, you said, like, when you're like alone, you're okay with being alone normally? Like, where do you think, like, you cross the line between being alone and feeling lonely?

NS: Once again, I honestly think it comes from, it just comes from, like, when I'm feeling really good in life, or like and if I'm really stressed I'll start to feel more lonely. I know that sounds weird, but like I really like being alone. I'm kind of introverted and I like sitting and thinking and, like, it's going to sound maybe silly, but like I really like to meditate a lot. I like to make a lot of art, but, like, sometimes when I'm feeling just like really icky and down in life in general, like, then doing those things feels lonely and, like, it's not as fun being alone.

FR: Yeah, totally. What do you think it is, like, when you do feel bad, what triggers, like, loneliness instead of just, like, sadness?

NS: Interesting, what triggers loneliness? Maybe just like the feeling that I don't—it's hard to say. Maybe it's the feelings of, like, feeling like I can't be around people and I want to. Um, I don't know, its—I, it's hard to say. Sometimes, like, if I'm just, like, really stressed out, I just don't feel good, like, alone.

FR: Totally. Having, like, other people around, like—

NS: I just get really antsy, like, if I'm studying or something and I'm like just really stressed out, then I want to study around other people. And I can't focus on that studying when I'm alone, like, I like think about, like, when I'm studying in my house or something and I just, like, cannot focus on studying, but if there's someone else sitting right there, then...

FR: I'm like totally the same way. Where it's like, I don't even have to be talking to you, or like, even, like, I don't have to know you, just like having other people around just, like, makes it easier to like move through my own little bubble.

NS: I guess, I don't know if that answers your question, though. Um, re-ask. Like, what was that question, again?

FR: Um—

NS: Sorry.

FR: —like when you're feeling kind of bad, icky, what triggers the loneliness, instead of just, like—

NS: I guess, thoughts maybe. I don't know. I don't really know how to answer this question because I'm always trying to figure it out myself actually. Like, I don't even quite understand what triggers that feeling of loneliness. Like, um, I guess when it's maybe, you know, if I feel like I can't connect to people around me too much, or like just get nervous and I'm like, oh gosh, okay, got to retreat to being lonely and I'm a lonely person and it's kind of like in my head, my thoughts, like, you're lonely! And then I feel really lonely.

FR: Do you think it is something like, that you can kind of, like, take control of and like convert into other feelings, or is it just like the same as like, I'm happy, just, I'm lonely. Going to ride it out.

NS: Um, kind of. I think that, like, when I'm lonely, I feel more motivated to make certain changes, so, like, you know, if I'm lonely, then I'll, like, try to be with other people more, like be around other people more. Like, I'll go outside and go for a hike if I'm feeling lonely. Like that, like that bad feeling of loneliness that comes from, um, because like I said, like a lot of the time, and most of the time I would say, I really enjoy being alone. But like feeling lonely is very different from being alone and to me, like, feeling alone feels like melancholy. So, I guess I'll like make different changes.

FR: That's like totally one of things I was reading about, was that, like, it was—this article was talking about, like, loneliness and how, like, when you feel lonely, it's like a natural emotion, but it, like, prompts people to like, actually, like, do something about it and it gives you more, like, drive to go, like, make that connection with someone else. So that's pretty funny.

NS: Yeah, if I'm feeling content, like being alone, then I'm just gonna like do whatever I'm doing in my house, like clean, make art, do homework and it's fine, but like, that sad feeling, like, is like telling me, like, go, like, go outside and like—not go outside, literally—I mean, maybe go outside, but like, go to that party and, like, hang out with friends and go to coffee with your friends. It's just like mostly a motivator for me, it seems.

FR: Do you think, like—wait, I had a question, but it escaped me. Like, if you never felt lonely, would you still, would you, like, still go out as much as you do?

NS: Maybe. Um, probably less. Um, well that's hard to say, like, I mean I like to go—I don't just go out and hang out with people because I'm lonely, but I, like I said, would definitely say I'm more of an introverted person that likes to do things on my own, even when I do go to parties, I do like to, like, I do like to go to parties alone because I can leave whenever I want and, um, like I don't have to, like, wait on anybody and nobody, I don't know, I don't have to help anybody or like they don't have to wait for me, blah, bah, blah. But, um, so I think that, yeah sometimes, like, I'm feeling like I need to reinvent myself, or like, go have fun with friends, like, and like make certain connections and it like—there's just something in me that like pushes me to do that. But, if I didn't have that loneliness, then I think I would probably just like, maybe sit at home

and play more guitar, or like make more watercolor pictures, or whatever, read a book, or something, so.

FR: Totally. Um, so like, how often do you, like, recognize that other people might be lonely, or like, perceive them as lonely?

NS: I guess, not very often. I feel like I've always kind of perceived people as not lonely. Like, um my freshman year especially, I was pretty lonely, like, coming into college and I lived in PCV, so I had my own room and it was just a very different experience than any of the dorms. And I remember, like, I would walk around and be like, wow, everyone, like, looks so happy with each other. But then, like, in reality I know that there's other people that are probably lonely, I just don't see them. Um, but I guess I generally feel like people aren't very lonely, which I think is wrong. I think that's definitely wrong, but nobody want to show their loneliness, so it feels like nobody's lonely.

FR: Yeah, it's like, so easy to get caught up in your own, like, alienation and—

NS: Yeah.

FR: —everyone looks like so much happier than you feel, you know what I mean?

NS: Yeah, yeah.

FR: Um, so like, like do you think social media contributes to our, like, perception of others, like, seeming not lonely?

NS: I think, in a way, yeah. I think yes and no. Because, for me, like, going on Instagram and seeing friends', like, posts with other friends, that'll make me feel lonely. Like, um, every once in a while. I mean, well, not really any more. I'd say in high school if that happened, like if all my friends, like, were hanging out and they posted on social media or something, then I'd be like oh my gosh, like, they're not with me, I'm so lonely, like, what happened, like. And it wasn't because they were trying to bully me, or be mean and not invite me. It just, you know, so happened they posted a picture. But, at the same time, I don't know, um, I feel like it can go the other way: I've made friends online and on the internet before, to be honest. Not so much anymore, but, like I think that it sometimes, like, you can relate to people on social media. And even like, maybe their loneliness? I think it goes both ways, for me.

FR: How did you meet people online?

NS: Well, in middle school, it was actually—this is so funny to, like, admit, but in middle school, I actually was pretty bullied, in person. I came—I went from a Catholic school to a public school when I was in sixth grade and all the kids were super mean to me because they all, like, knew that I went to a Catholic school. And this was like small-town Paso. And, um, so I would like go home and play Halo 3 on the Xbox and that's how I made a bunch of friends, actually. Like, actual friends, that are still kind of my friends now. Um, and I've like met them and stuff, and like also I don't really use Tumblr anymore, but I used to, like, make friends

through Tumblr too. Um, and I guess, like, when you just, like, follow certain accounts, like, maybe on Tumblr or like, Instagram, and you, like, maybe they're like a little bit Instagram famous, or like, a little bit Tumblr famous, but you, like, find yourself, or I found myself relating to them when I was feeling lonely. And it like made me realize that other people were feeling similar to me.

FR: Do you think it was that, like, connection in like, interests, or like, like, I don't know, feeling, that like made you like, feel this lonely?

NS: I guess, just like, the ability to, like, be able to connect to other people made me feel less lonely. Like, being able to relate and realizing, like, that the way I'm feeling isn't—it's not just me. I mean of course it can be really toxic to relate to other people sometimes, but I get really caught up, like, when I feel lonely, just assuming that it's me. That I'm the only one feeling that way and I'm going to feel that way forever. So, like, being able to meet other people indirectly like that, that are also kind of feeling lonely too maybe? Um, kind of just like helped me realize.

FR: Did you ever, like, contact them directly and like, have a back-and-forth or were you just following their posts and kind of like identifying with it?

NS: Um, I guess like, I never contacted certain people, um. I directly contacted people through messages. So we'd like message and stuff, or like text, or like, on Facebook. Never, like, in person, with the Tumblr people. But the Xbox people, like, we'd be talking on, like, on the headset, so. I know it's really funny actually, to think about. I had, like, one friend in the sixth grade and, um, it was funny—she was friends with all the, like, mean-type girls. They were really mean to me and I always looked at it like she, she, um, gave up those friends to, like, be my friend. And so, besides her, I literally just had those Xbox people. But sometimes she would have—she would come over to my house, I remember, and be like, Natalya we're gonna go, like, hang out somewhere now. Sixth grade, seventh grade. Good times. Um, but now, I guess, to be honest, I don't really use social media as much anymore. At least not what I used to use it for, like when I was growing up. I don't really use it to connect to people anymore. Um, I don't even have a phone. Um, which is funny, so last summer, my phone broke and I didn't have one, I didn't want to replace it. And then I finally replaced it, and then it broke again, and then I'm just like, over it. And, it's actually really nice to, like, not be looking at social media.

FR: Why?

NS: Um, I wasn't—it's not so much because it made me feel lonely, but mostly just because, like, it was a waste of my time. And I don't think social media as a whole is a waste of time, but, um, using it to, like just look at other peoples' lives to me, is more of a waste of time. And I think it's cool to, like, post pictures—I'm not saying, like, that, um, that like, you know, like, use of social media is a waste of time for everyone either, but like, for me I think that I would much rather use the internet, like, I guess to, um, read about world news and stuff. Especially as an anthropology major, I really like to do that. And like, I really like to try to keep up with politics. I use social media more so to, like, meet up with people now. Like, go to events, or like, hey, let's hang out, I guess. Not so much, like, looking at peoples' content.

FR: Yeah, um, how much do you think you, like, post versus, like, message, or like directly contact people in like, yeah.

NS: I don't think I post much. Like on Facebook, I really don't post much at all, but I use, like, the groups that Facebook has, like, to connect with different people, um, or like, if I see an event is on Facebook, like it's a really nice reminder to be like, oh yeah this event's today, and like, go check on this event. And like, um, or like, yeah, I'd much rather direct message people that I'm friends with, than like, post—even like send them pictures through direct message instead of like, post one to my entire wall. I guess Instagram's like a little bit different for me though. I don't really use that. I just use Instagram to like, look at nice things, I guess, kind of like Tumblr or Pinterest. Yeah.

FR: Yeah, totally.

NS: And like, everyone always posts, like, really pretty things on—or not pretty, but like, really interesting things on Instagram, so I like to see that. Yeah.

FR: Especially with, like, Instagram video now—

NS: Yeah.

FR: —people are doing some, like, really cool stuff.

NS: And like, most of the people that I follow are my friends. They post, like, like, a picture of, like, a really pretty, like scenery thing. Or like a really interesting corner of a bathroom, I don't know. Or like, themselves in a selfie, or something. So, um, and I kind of enjoy seeing that, like, when I go on Instagram.

FR: So like, you say you don't really use social media that much anymore?

NS: No.

FR: Like, how often do you think you do?

NS: Well, I guess I still use it much, like, plenty, um, I just use it less because I don't have my phone. So, um, throughout the day when I don't have my phone, I like clearly can't use it, but if I'm at home, then I'll like—it's actually really annoying that like, habitually, I'll go to Facebook first—it's kind of weird, um. And so I like, do check Facebook or like, I use Facebook to like, message certain people because I don't have a phone, actually. And so I do scroll through and like, see it and I try to like, keep myself off of it when I'm trying to like, do homework with my laptop. Be like, no, like, exit out of this, no Tumblr. No, no Reddit. No Pinterest. Yeah, so.

FR: I like, do this thing when I'm like, open on my computer and I go on the internet, and like, the most immediate thing for my hands is just to do the like—

NS: The F!

FR: —the F-A—

NS: Yes, yeah!

FR: —and then like, enter.

NS: Yes!

FR: And like, it's just like, like a normal thing!

NS: It's so, um, and I, I've actually, like listened to a lot of podcasts about it. Like, different—I really like podcasts about it actually. Um, and I've listened to a lot of podcasts about, like, social media use and, but just like not much about like how it makes us feel, but mostly just the fact that we are kind of addicted to it as a culture. Um, but I think it's like—I guess I think it's unfair to say that this addiction actually completely makes you feel a certain way because it's so different for everybody. Um, I mean like I said, I've like, read a lot of the stuff that you were talking about before, about how social media makes you feel, but I feel like, as a culture, like in our generation and as other generations grow up, they will like, it'll just be a part of us. Not like, physically a part of us, but like, it kind of just is a part of our identities, and that's not necessarily to me, like, a good or a bad thing. Could be bad, I don't know. We'll have to wait and see.

FR: Like, totally I agree with you. Like, this is just another tool that we have at our disposal and like, sure you can, like, you can contact the entire world in a day, or whatever, or you can like talk to one person and that's like—everybody has their own, like, habits and like, ways around it to, like, make their social medias work best in their own way.

NS: Yeah, yeah. Definitely. And that's kind of like, what it seems like it's trying to do a lot of the time. I don't know, at least for me, it's like so we use it beneficially for our own lives. And I do see it, like as beneficial. It's just like when I'm like clicking on it obsessively, or something, like over and over again because I'm bored, or lonely. If I'm lonely, then I'll like click on it a lot, but.

FR: Yeah, like this thing I was reading was talking about how like, people who rated, like, higher in being lonely, were like, more likely to just like, scroll through and do, like single-click type of things—

NS: Yeah.

FR: —than actually like, write out something pointed—

NS: Yes.

FR: —to, in response to a specific thing.

NS: I can definitely relate to that. Actually a lot. Like, the way I use social media is more reflective of my feelings. So like, if I'm feeling, like, anxious, or like, annoyed, or tired, I'll just like scroll through it and like, like, like, like, like, I don't care. Like, but if I'm feeling, if I'm feeling fine, then maybe I'll comment on my friend's picture, like, if I'm feeling better, or like, feeling like, I don't know. I feel like the way I feel directs how I use social media for sure. And like, what I'm willing to do on it and use it for.

FR: Like, this is so funny and like, is like, totally validating like, how many things, like, articles I read, but sorry that I keep sharing all of these research things

NS: No, no it's totally fine. Go for it.

FR: —like, there's like, like this contention too about like, if it was social media that affects loneliness, or if loneliness affects, like, how you use social media. And so there's like—I read something on each side, but like, it's totally true, you know? Like, how can just, like, using a tool affect your mood all the way, it's kind of like this thing that—

NS: To me, it's more like a cycle, like of if I'm already feeling lonely, then it'll make me feel more lonely. Or like, um, it's less about like, I don't know, like, picking the side of like, which affects which, more like, yeah if I'm lonely, it'll definitely affect that. And then it'll make me feel more lonely in turn. But if I'm like, feeling good about myself and like, spending my time with my friends, then I will use it and like, comment on peoples' posts or like, I'll post a picture of something, or like, post a picture of what I did, even. I don't know. It's like, definitely more like of a lens that we look through the world. It's like, a doorway. I don't know if that makes sense. I don't know. Probably not.

FR: I get you, I get you. I kind of get where you're getting at, you know? Like it's something that you have to like, let into your life, I guess? And, I don't know, it's hard to conceptualize.

NS: Yeah, yeah definitely. I think that in the future too, we'll be able to conceptualize it a little bit better and like, discuss the effects of it a little bit more as time goes on and as we make these connections to like, how we act and how we feel. But I think it just takes time. Also it's really hard to pinpoint, like, our feelings and emotions in general as humans. Like, so how do we know that it's social media that's making us feel this way? So.

FR: Totally, it's like so much more complex than we can even, like understand right now. It's totally going to be one of those things that, like, when we're like eighty years old, like oh, back, back then, people didn't know that like, doing all this, like—

NS: Could affect this, yeah. And I don't look at it like it's going to be a positive or negative thing in the future, I'm just going to like—I'm trying to like look at it as is. Like, it's going to make me have the effects that it does on me as a person and that's like fine, but it is interesting to like, think about how like, people thought about smoking when smoking first came out. And like, then it became, like there were these really ridiculous effects of smoking and it was actually like really bad. And I'm not saying that, like, Facebook or social media is going to be like, smoking for us, or like, for me, but it could. It could go that way. Or maybe it'll be really beneficial for

me in the future, still. There's—it's hard for me to say, but. Although I like, I do sometimes feel like it makes me feel like a little bit more lonely, but I just can't tell. I don't know.

FR: It is hard to like, pinpoint, and there's no like, one cause and effect, like, relationship in there. It's like—it's everything.

NS: What makes me feel most lonely with social media actually, is like how much, um, if I'm—since I don't have a phone, and I don't mind, like, people that I'm around being on their phones, but it will make me lonely, like when I go to a friend's house, and like, all of my friends are just like, sitting on their phones laughing at memes together. I mean, it's hard just because like, I guess I'm just like, not a part of meme culture and they are, or something and, um, that's like when I feel most lonely, really, around them. Or like, my roommate, I see her like, scrolling a lot, a lot, a lot, and that's—I'm not ever mad at anybody for being on their phones, but like, I guess I just feel like, oh, like, am I missing out on something? Or like, I kind of wish we were all just like connecting with each other, like, in a real way. Not that that's not real, but—I don't know. I feel like they're taken away from what's like presently around them.

FR: Yeah, it's like a whole other thing to like, dive into that like, just wraps you up, you know? And it's so easy to like, get lost in like, scrolling because you can scroll forever, you know?

NS: Yeah.

FR: Um, so like, there's like, different types of loneliness that I've been reading about. And so, emotional or intimate loneliness is like a feeling of isolation and inability to like, share aspects of your life and like, your thoughts, like, intimately with other people. Social loneliness is like, actual isolation and like, not having those social networks to like, reach out to, like at all. And then existential loneliness is like, being alienated and helpless, like nothing you do would matter and like, you wouldn't be able to connect with people anyway. Like, do you identify with any of these the most or pop any of them?

NS: Yeah, yeah. Um, I think mostly, like, once again, I guess the theme I'm going with with these lonelinesses, um, if I am not feeling good about myself, then I might feel that existential loneliness. Like, in general, if I'm just really stressed out or like, already feeling really depressed or anxious, um, then I, yeah, will feel more helplessly alone, um. And then, um, I'll like—that sort of feeling motivates me, I think. Like, it hurts for a little while, or like, it feels uncomfortable to be that sort of lonely for a while, but it motivates me to, like, go out and make friends. And then that would be like, for me, kind of like a social loneliness, um. And I—I'm kind of like an all-or-nothing person, I think with loneliness, too, so I either feel like, really lonely, or like, pretty fine.

FR: Totally. Have you like, found anything that, like, alleviates your loneliness?

NS: Um, I guess just like telling myself—not just telling myself, but like getting myself to like, go out and have good social interactions with people. Or like, just like, find ways to connect to people a little bit more. Um, like if I'm feeling an existential loneliness, then I will like hang out with my roommate a little bit more and have some like, good talks with her or something, or like,

um, even like go to therapy, just like, talk it and like feel less lonely. And if I'm feeling socially like—if I'm feeling socially, like, lonely, then I will do my best to go to more parties, or something. So. And then, um, intimate loneliness, for me, I guess, I don't always feel as much, like, I don't feel like I have a problem with it as much. It's mostly like when I'm feeling existentially alone, I guess.

FR: Yeah, totally.

NS: Then I feel like I can't connect intimately to people.

FR: Yeah, um. Do you have, like, any advice for people feeling lonely? Like, and like, not even that loneliness is a bad thing in itself, but like any thoughts on, like, how people should handle their loneliness?

NS: I think it's definitely different for everyone, but I'd say that if you're feeling really lonely, like, change up your routine. Like, maybe find a way to see, like, different people around. And like, also realize, for me, like realizing that it's just a feeling and that it doesn't last is really nice. Um, and then also looking at it, for me, as a motivator, rather than like, a bad thing, um, I try to like, frame it and perceive it as something more positive for me.

FR: Awesome. Um, this, this is a funny one. At night, when you look into the sky, what do you think about?

NS: Oh man. That's a funny question. Um, gosh, I am like, such an existential person in general, um, so I look—I think about how vast the world is and how big it is. Um, and sometimes that makes me feel more lonely, but sometimes that almost makes me feel at ease. Um, yeah, I just look at the sky and I'm like holy shit. We live in a big place and I don't understand it at all. Um. Yeah.

FR: How can people understand the entire world, though?

NS: I think that's like, a goal for a lot of us, like that's what keeps us going as a species almost, but um, we have to realize that that's literally impossible because like, I guess I'll use another metaphor: like, the horizon line just keeps, like, getting pushed, you know. Like, the more you learn about life, the more you learn that there's things to discover about life, which is really interesting. Um, yeah.

FR: Super interesting.

NS: and that's I guess what I look at—think about when I look at the sky.

FR: Thank you, um. That's pretty much all of the questions I have, so, any last thing that you want to say that you like think people should know?

NS: Being alone is okay. Honestly, like being alone is really okay, um. And it's okay to feel alone too, yeah.

FR: Right on.

NS: Yeah.

FR: Oh my god, that's everything I had.

NS: Awesome.

FR: Thank you so much for like, meeting with me.

NS: Yeah, of course. Yeah, it was awesome. It's interesting to think about those things.

FR: It's hard to, like, put these things into words.

NS: Also, I think it's really hard to get people to talk about them too.

FR: I, yeah I feel the same way. Like, initially, when I was, like, telling people what my project was about, I felt like really awkward being like, it's about, like, loneliness, like, are they going to think I'm lonely?

NS: Well loneliness is so stigmatized.

FR: Right?

NS: Yeah, and so like, I just feel like it's really hard to get people to talk about it. Um, but I don't know. We've all been there.

FR: I know, yeah. It's like a feeling everybody has and it's just like people are trying to make it like there's good and bad emotions and I'm only going to show you my good emotions and I'm like everybody kind of has that, like, dark, existential side.

NS: Definitely. I think that, um, it's interesting because sometimes maybe I feel like I'll even share that a little bit too much with people and that'll make me more lonely. Maybe that's just like, me being in my head, but um, sometimes, like I love talking about existential ideas and like, our existence, I don't know. It's very interesting to me, but I feel like sometimes being around the wrong people and trying to talk about those things, it's like way too vulnerable to talk about.

FR: Like, I totally have that some feeling, where it's like am I being too vulnerable? Like, where is like, there being too vulnerable and being vulnerable so that you like, like people get that that's like your inner self that you're sharing with them?

NS: Yeah.

FR: It's like this weird line and I don't know where it is.

NS: Yeah, feel that.

FR: Well, thank you.